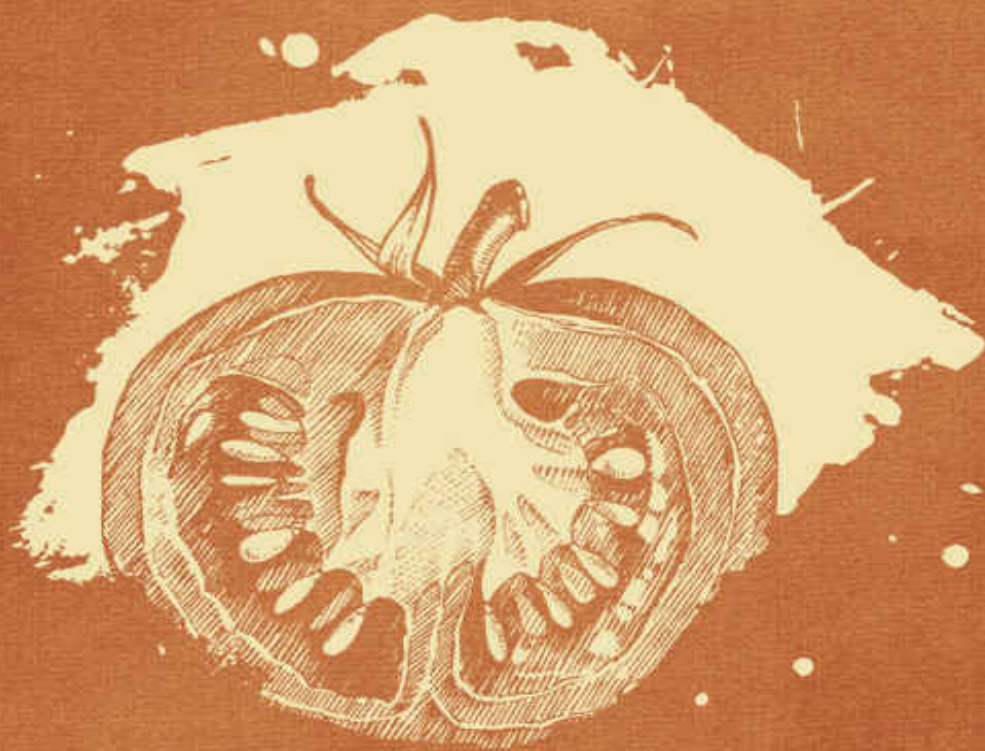


MRS. BRADLEY SERIES

The
MAN WHO
GREW TOMATOES



GLADYS
MITCHELL

THE MAN WHO GREW TOMATOES

Two deaths by drowning were followed by verdicts of Accidental Death, but neither the heir to the estate involved nor Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley was satisfied with these verdicts.

The Man who Grew Tomatoes is set in East Anglia, with excursions for salmon fishing into Scotland, and is undoubtedly one of the most exciting of Miss Mitchell's novels.

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THE MAN WHO GREW TOMATOES

GLADYS MITCHELL

 THOMAS & MERCER

“No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf’s-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss’d
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow’s mysteries.”

John Keats

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*To my dear JULIET O'HEA without permission but with
affection and gratitude*

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CHAPTER ONE

Inheritance

"Gladness shall clothe the earth, we will enstille
The face of things an universal smile."

Richard Crashaw

On a wonderful Wednesday in September, Hugh Camber went to take possession of his inheritance. He left his lodgings in London at nine in the morning, convinced that he would never return to them again. The business with the lawyers was completed; the old house waited to welcome the new heir; the village, no doubt, was en fête to greet "Mr. Harry's boy," and, possibly, no one was sorry to be rid of the testy widower Paul and his delicate son, Stephen.

Hugh Camber was forty, the physical counterpart of Mr. Rochester but totally unlike him in character. His father, the younger son of old Henry Camber of Camber Abbey, had been left one-ninth of the family fortune and had squandered it angrily, referring to it with great contempt as "that handful of halfpence." He then married a quiet and sensible young woman who bore him two sons—Hugh, now heir to the family money and estates, and, three years later, another boy christened Henry, after his father and grandfather, and known to the family as Hal.

The mother contrived, by means known only to herself, to scrape together enough money to send the two boys to an obscure public school. From this, Hugh went into the Civil Service and Hal became a charter pilot and was killed in a crash, leaving a widow and a very young son.

Harry, Hugh's father, had died when Hal was fifteen, and Hugh, very much his mother's son, had helped her to keep the younger brother at school until he was seventeen. Once Hal was launched, Hugh looked after his mother until her death, and without any help from Hal. Although he missed her sorely, it never occurred to him to fill the blank by marrying. He knew that Hal had married, but he had never seen his son, who was still a very small child at the time of Hal Camber's funeral.

Although his own father had shaken the dust of the family estate off his feet, Hugh had often visited Camber at the invitation of Arthur Camber, his wealthy uncle. Arthur was a kindly man, and Hugh often thought that some of the family money found its way surreptitiously into his mother's banking account, compensation, possibly, for the discrepancy between her circumstances and those of Gertrude Camber, Arthur's indulged and extravagant wife.

Thus Hugh was comparatively well-acquainted with Cousin Paul, Arthur's only son and, under Arthur's will (the Camber estates were not entailed) the heir-apparent to the property.

In the course of time, first Gertrude and then Arthur died, leaving Paul, a man of twenty-eight, already married and with a baby boy named Stephen, in possession of the inheritance. Since that time Hugh had seen little of the house or of its new owner. He had been invited one Christmas, but it proved to be an occasion of grandeur which had left Hugh uncorrupted by envy but which had shown him clearly that as a relation he was not considered an asset by Paul and his wife.

When he read in the obituary columns that Paul's wife had died, he sent a letter of condolence which was acknowledged briefly, not by Paul but by the secretary who also acted as Stephen's tutor. When he read, a few years later, that the boy, then fifteen, had been drowned,

he did not write. When, shortly afterwards, Paul himself was drowned upon a fishing holiday, Hugh wondered whether it could have been suicide. He soon dismissed the thought, in the belief that Paul was not the man to take his own life. His reaction, apart from grieving for his son, would have been to marry again and beget another. Fate, obviously, had had other plans for Paul. Strange, though, thought Hugh, that both father and son had been drowned; stranger still that the two deaths had brought him back to Camber, this time not as a poor relation but as owner. Paul, surprisingly, had left him the estate.

The train pulled in to the station and Hugh hoisted down his hand-luggage from the rack and helped an elderly woman with hers. He had written to the housekeeper at Camber Abbey, asking for a car to meet him. At the station entrance the chauffeur from Camber, a saturnine young man with Spanish side-whiskers and a self-contained air, helped him to stow the luggage in the boot of the car.

"Anything more, sir?"

"No. Haven't I seen you before? What's your name?"

"Crick, sir. No, we've never met, Mr. Camber."

The drive took three-quarters of an hour through country which Hugh well remembered. The housekeeper was on the steps to welcome him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hugh. You'll like to have a cup of tea, I expect."

"No, thanks, Mrs. Brunton." (The lawyers had reminded him of her name.) "I didn't have lunch on the train, so perhaps you can find me something solid. This Norfolk air makes me hungry."

"Very good, sir. Crick will bring up your bags. I'll show you the room we've got ready."

He followed her up the stairs, the chauffeur coming behind with a suitcase in either hand. Mrs. Brunton opened a door. The room was low-ceilinged; dark with

ancient oak. He went straight to the window and looked out, reflecting, still with a sense of wonder, that all he looked on was his own.

Below him was a very broad terrace which stretched the whole front of the house. Beyond it was pasture on which some cattle were grazing. There was no garden, as such, but, to his left, he could see the narrow head of the lake. A gravel path led away to the double gates through which the car had passed. The lodge—no lodge-keepers now—was tenanted, he had been told, by artists who resided there from April until October but who went back to London for the winter. They would be gone pretty soon, he supposed, as it was midway through September. Hugh turned away from the window to find that the chauffeur had gone and that the housekeeper was still in the doorway.

“All right, then, Mrs. Brunton,” he said. “I’ll wash and brush up, as they say, and be down in about ten minutes.”

As he washed his hands and combed his hair he wondered what he was going to be given to eat. He was famished, for his landlady, not at all pleased at losing a quiet, reliable tenant, had provided an inadequate breakfast. Accustomed to saving his money, Hugh had not thought of lunching on the train, feeling certain that a meal would be ready for him at Camber.

He remembered where the dining-room was. The housekeeper herself waited on him. There was soup, followed by cold ham, a beetroot, and some cheese.

“I hadn’t thought of anything until dinner tonight, sir, so, if you can manage with this...”

“Of course. But—you don’t usually bring in food and wait at table, Mrs. Brunton, do you?”

“No, sir, and shall not be doing so again.”

“No, hardly your job. Where are the maids? Their half-day off?” (The lawyers had told him that the house was

fully staffed. The women might have changed their half-day for once, he thought. They did not get a new master very often.)

"The maids? They went, sir."

"I see. I suppose they go in to Norwich when they get the time."

"They've left. They said they wouldn't stay any longer."

"Why not?" Hugh spoke sharply, but the housekeeper remained calm.

"And I'd like you to accept my own notice, too, sir. I waited until you arrived, but now I should like to leave. My married daughter is expecting me tonight."

Hugh took a spoonful of soup. He had not spent twenty-two years in the Civil Service for nothing. If there is one thing worth learning, he reflected, it is not to rush any fences. There was a mystery in the air; that was certain. Something was wrong, but nothing would be gained by his being too precipitate.

"I see," he said. "But what's the idea? You've been here some time, haven't you?"

"Eleven years, sir. Since poor little Master Stephen was a child of four. Such a dear little boy, and so delicate. It was a wicked shame he should die like that, and such dreadful things said about him."

"I hardly knew him," said Hugh. "I don't think I saw him after his christening. What dreadful things were said about him?"

"That he was drunk when he fell in the water."

"Drunk?"

"Yes, sir, drunk."

"What? A boy of that age?"

"That's what's been said."

"By whom?"

"I don't know who started it. I wish I did. But a good number of folk have asked me whether it was true. As if it

could have been! Why, the master never touched a drop of anything! It's wicked talk, that's what it is!"

"How did it all happen?"

"I could hardly tell you, sir. I never did think it right for Master Stephen to go about on his own so much, but, of course, not going to school and that, he had nobody to visit in the holidays or to ask here as a guest, and, after Mr. Verith went, Master Stephen pined for him, I think, and took to going off, sometimes for the whole day, by himself. It was not my place to say anything, but I did hear Mrs. Hal ask Mr. Paul once whether he thought it was safe."

"Still, the boy was fifteen, Mrs. Brunton. He shouldn't require apron strings at that age. Lots of boys like roving about on their own, you know."

"Strong, big lads, sir, maybe do. But Master Stephen was frail. Besides, he did mope after Mr. Verith went, I know he did. I was very fond of Master Stephen and I could read him like a book. He lost all trust in his father after he sent Mr. Verith away."

"Oh, Paul sent the tutor away, did he?"

"He could hardly help it, sir. There was trouble with a young girl."

"Oh, I see."

"Mr. Paul was very proper about that sort of thing. She was a very respectable girl, too, until Mr. Verith took her to London for a week-end and brought about her ruin."

"Oh, dear!" (Paul had never had the reputation of being particularly proper as a young man. He must have reformed, Hugh decided.)

"Her father came up and created. Farmer Beresford it was. He wanted Mr. Paul to see Mr. Verith married the girl, but Mr. Verith denied it all and said not to lay the girl's ruin at his door, as it certainly was not him that was responsible. So Mr. Paul orders Mr. Verith to marry and

keep his job or to get out, and Mr. Verith—so Crick told Gertie, that was housemaid here until today—Mr. Verith said as he was not going to give his ancient and honoured name to some other man's bastard, not if the Angel Gabriel bade him to do so."

"Very spirited of him. So he went?"

"He did, sir, and it's my earnest and powerful belief that poor Master Stephen would be alive today if Mr. Verith had still been with us. It seemed like a judgement on the master because, when the girl's baby was born, it had no look at all of Mr. Verith."

"You can't go by that. All babies look very much alike, no matter what their fond relatives may say. Anyway, the fact remains that this Verith did persuade the girl to go to London with him, and I don't suppose his sole object in doing so was to take her to the Zoo."

Mrs. Brunton sniffed but made no other comment. Her next remarks were purely practical. Had she done rightly, she wanted to know. Dinner had been arranged for half-past six, so that she could catch the eight-fifteen train.

"As I hope there will be no objection to Crick driving me to the station? It's been usual," she said when, later, she brought in the dinner.

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Brunton. A pleasant journey."

She hesitated.

"As I do hope you realise it isn't personal feeling, sir. It's just what's happened. None of us can abide the place any more."

Hugh decided not to ask for an explanation. All he said was:

"What about Crick? Does *he* propose to go, too?"

"Crick is not a woman, sir. The gardeners likewise. All the outdoor staff will stay, being men."

"I see." The housekeeper seemed to be inviting him to demand the reason for this distinction between the sexes, but Hugh applied himself to his meal and Mrs. Brunton waited upon him in silence. She brought in coffee at the end and asked whether she should take it to the library. He said he would have it at table, so she left the tray beside him and went away. A little later he heard the car drive off. He lit a cigarette, finished his coffee, and strolled out on to the terrace. It was a fine, still evening, with mist over the lake and the beginning of a moon. He paced up and down, rueful and puzzled. He had had no very clear picture of his homecoming (as he had thought of it ever since he had received the lawyers' letter) but it had never presented itself as a matter of a servantless ménage and a disappearing housekeeper, but rather as an occasion for the fatted calf and general rejoicing. He took a few turns up and down the terrace and then went back to the dining-room and rang the bell, determined to find out whether there was anyone else in the house, or whether the echoing mansion was tenanted by him alone.

The bell was answered by a girl of about sixteen. She stood in the doorway with the door wide open behind her and gazed at Hugh. He smiled at her.

"Do you know where I can find some whisky, Mary?"

"The master never took it, sir, and my name's Daisy."

"All right, Daisy. Send Crick up to me, will you, as soon as he gets back?"

"Mr. Crick go home, sir, at half-past eight, soon as that hev his supper."

"Where's his home?"

"By Cuddaford Bridge, sir. That live with his mother."

"I see. Well, he'll have to come back here to get his supper and put the car away, I suppose. Send him up as soon as he comes back."

"That won't listen to me." There was no pertness here; merely a statement of fact.

"That must!" Her soft, singing accent with the rising inflection had irritated him. "If he doesn't come at once, he's sacked. Understand?"

Daisy looked scared, sketched an orphanage curtsy, and withdrew. Hugh began to whistle, a sign, with him, of a disturbed mind. He went to the sideboard and looked inside, but there was nothing but a bottle of orange-juice. He flung the cupboard to and took out another cigarette. Crick opened the door half an hour later and stood just inside it, leaving it open, as Daisy had done.

"Sir?"

"Have you been using the car?"

"Only as usual, for Mrs. B."

"Have you put it away?"

"No, sir."

"Bit of luck for you. I want you to go out and buy me a bottle of whisky. If you can get a siphon of soda and some small dry gingers, bring them back as well. Know where to go?"

"No, sir."

"In that case, better go into Norwich. If you can't get whisky, bring rum. You can always get that."

"My work finishes at half-past eight, sir, and I haven't had my supper. I had arrangements with the late master, sir."

"We shall have to reconsider those arrangements, Crick. What happens if I want to go to an evening performance at the Maddermarket?"

"I couldn't say, sir. The master never went out after dinner." The chauffeur's tone was carefully impersonal. Hugh read insolence into it. He spoke quietly.

"I see. Well, Crick, I suppose you've had no warning that I might have different ideas, so you can drive me to the local pub and I'll see what I can charm out of the landlord. I'll walk back, so you'll be able to put the car away and get your supper."

“Beg pardon, sir, but I reckon on the use of the car to get me home to Cuddaford Bridge, and back again here in the morning, sir. It’s always been understood.”

“Not any longer,” said Hugh flatly. “The car is for my use, not yours.”

The pub sold nothing but beer and Norfolk cider. Hugh ordered a pint of beer and carried it to a bench beside a table. He took a very long time to drink it. The pub was neutral territory, he decided, and neutral territory, as no friendly territory seemed to be at hand, was desirable if he was to think out his position.

He stayed for the best part of an hour, then, having come to no conclusion except that the servants had got out of hand, a conclusion he had reached when the housekeeper left, he pushed his pint pot towards the middle of the table and got up. Before he reached the door a man who was seated on a bench near it got up, too, brushing his moustache, and they approached the door together. Hugh stood back for the other to go first, and was surprised to find the moustached man waiting for him outside.

“Evening, Mr. Camber.”

“Good evening, Mr....?”

“Beresford. Bill Beresford. I farm over at Broadlands. One of your tenants, Mr. Camber.”

“Glad to hear it. But how do you know who I am?”

“I saw your car as I come in here tonight and I said to myself as it must be the new Mr. Camber, seeing, too, that Maurice Crick was driving.”

“Tell me, Mr. Beresford,” said Hugh, seizing, as he thought, an opportunity, “what I’ve done to get myself disliked down here.”

“You, sir? Nothing that I know of. For why?”

“There are no indoor servants left at Camber Abbey except a half-baked tweeny and the outdoor staff. What’s eaten them? Do you know?”

“Not to say that I *know*. I can give a pretty good guess, but it isn’t my way to make trouble in families, no matter what trouble’s been made for me.”

Light dawned on Hugh. Beresford was the father of the girl who had gone to London for the week-end with the tutor.

“I wish you’d give me the benefit of your guess, Mr. Beresford,” he said. “I’m entirely in the dark. I haven’t been to Camber since young Stephen was a small child, yet, before my arrival, nearly all the women servants had left and the housekeeper only stayed to give me a couple of meals before she also took herself off. If you can shed any light I’d be very grateful indeed.”

“I’m not bursting to help anybody of your house, Mr. Camber. I’ve nothing against you personally, but there are matters connected with that house that I don’t and can’t forgive.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Are you walking home, sir?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll step along with you, if I may. I dare say,” he went on, as they left the lights of the inn behind them, “you feel I should explain my words.”

“No,” said Hugh, who had taken a slight dislike to the farmer, “I don’t see why you should. Mrs. Bruton told me about the man Verith.”

“She did?”

“But it’s a little unreasonable, isn’t it, to hold my cousin responsible for what a tutor in his household chose to do?”

“If it *was* the tutor!” said Beresford. “My girl swears it wasn’t, and she ought to know. Trouble is, she won’t name who it was and, to put it plain, Mr. Camber, I suspected Mr. Paul himself.”

“Oh, come, now, Beresford! That won’t do at all! It seems to me your girl didn’t want to marry Verith and

that's why she wouldn't agree he was the man. If it really was my cousin, why wouldn't she name him?"

"With me holding my farm from him? She's made a bad mistake, Mr. Camber, but she's got her head screwed on tight. She could never have proved it, once she'd been fool enough to spend that week-end in London with young Verith. Who would have believed her?"

"You did, apparently."

They walked on in silence for a bit; then Hugh, who felt the constraint of the silence, repeated, in a different form, the question he had asked in the beginning.

"Look, Beresford, whatever has happened is neither my fault nor my responsibility, so why is everyone fighting shy of me?"

There was a long silence, as though Beresford was rehearsing his answer.

"I only know what my wife tells me. All the women say it around here, it seems. They think Mrs. Hal Camber is coming to run the Hall for you, and it's her the women-servants fight shy of; it isn't you."

"Mrs. Hal? My brother's widow? Good heavens, man, the suggestion's preposterous! I don't need her help. I shall engage another housekeeper in place of Mrs. Brunton, that's all! I don't propose to do much entertaining, anyway. I certainly shouldn't invite Mrs. Hal Camber to run my house for me."

"She might not wait for an invitation, Mr. Camber. She's a very managing woman."

"Well, she won't manage *me*, and you can tell people so. Wherever did such a notion come from?"

"Likely from the lady herself, Mr. Camber. Anyway, that's how the land lies. Mrs. Brunton, who visits at our place every now and then, couldn't make her arrangements quick enough when *she* got wind of the situation, I can tell you!"

“Well, thanks very much for tipping me off, Beresford. Why, I don’t even *know* Mrs. Hal. The only times I ever met her were here at Camber one Christmas, and at my brother’s funeral. I didn’t even go to the wedding.”

“I’ll see the wife spreads the news, then. Good night, Mr. Camber.” He strode off into the darkness. Hugh walked briskly in through the great double gates (permanently open, since the people in the lodge were rent-paying tenants) and made sure that Crick had put the car away. Then he went into the house and rang the bell again. Daisy presented herself.

“Are you and I the only occupants of the house, Daisy?”

“Oh, no, sir. I get my mother and sister to come here to sleep.”

“Very sensible of you. Ask your mother and sister to come here for a few minutes, will you?”

He offered the three of them chairs when Daisy returned with her relatives, but they remained standing in a row, the mother wearing a respectable black straw hat of uncertain vintage, the sister inclined to simper, and Daisy herself to giggle nervously.

“I hope Daisy didn’t take a liberty, sir, asking us up to sleep along of her?” the mother tentatively enquired.

“No, no, not at all. But I am curious about the circumstances which seem to have made it necessary. Why on earth, Mrs....?”

“Norgate, sir.”

“Mrs. Norgate, have the other servants walked out on me like this?—without, mind you, even stopping long enough to find out what sort of employer I should make.”

Mrs. Norgate gazed at him and Hugh experienced the same feeling as that which he had had at one point during his conversation with Beresford. She seemed to be preparing what she was going to say before she said it.

"Well, it might be for one reason and it might be for two," she admitted at last.

"What's the second reason, Mrs. Norgate?"

But Mrs. Norgate was not prepared to be hustled. She studied him with her far-seeing Norfolk eyes, the eyes of those accustomed to wide distances both of earth and sky, and then replied:

"It get about up here that you have no wife."

"Well, there were plenty of servants to chaperone each other, weren't there?"

As an effort of lighthearted speech it was a complete failure. Daisy giggled in an anguished sort of way; her sister said, "Oo, fancy!" Her mother remained unruffled but contrived to indicate clearly that Hugh had been guilty of a breach of taste. He felt a fool.

"It get about that Mrs. Hal Camber come and keep house for you, that's all, sir."

"Well, I don't see why *that* should frighten them all away!" Hugh was annoyed with himself and spoke sharply. "What's the real reason, Mrs. Norgate?"

"That go to be the real reason, one of the two you hear me speak of, Mr. Camber. The other—that seem the girls think this might be a very unlucky house."

"Because of the deaths of my cousin and his son? I thought as much. Sheer superstition, Mrs. Norgate. Anyway, I'm very glad Daisy isn't so silly."

"You go to promote Daisy, I take it, if that stay."

It was not a request, but an instruction. Hugh said he would consider it favourably. In the morning Crick gave notice. Hugh thought it was because he had been refused the use of the car. He said cheerfully:

"That's all right, Crick. Did Mr. Paul ever write you a character?"

"No, I don't need none. I got me a job in a garage."

"That's good. Well, good-bye, Crick." He felt a sense of relief when the young man had gone, but the feeling

looked like being short-lived. The gardeners sent word by Daisy that they would like to see him. He told her, curtly, to send them up.

"They have dirty boots, sir."

"All right. I'll see them in the gun-room."

He was prepared to give the gardeners short shrift, although he badly wanted to keep them. Gardening was not his hobby, and, in any case, he supposed there would be too much to do for one amateur, even if it were. It was true that there was no garden at the front of the house, but it was flanked by flowerbeds on either side and there were greenhouses, a couple of lawn-tennis courts, and a water-lily pond to be looked after. He shook his head. The gardeners came in.

"Right, you chaps," he said. "Let me make one thing clear, as there seems to be some misunderstanding. I hear there's a rumour going about that my younger brother's widow, Mrs. Hal Camber, is to run this house. It isn't true, and I'd rather like to know how the talk began. Can either of you enlighten me?"

The gardeners were father and son, a stocky, grizzled, slow-moving, quiet-eyed man and a six-foot sprig of eighteen. They exchanged glances.

"Suit us to be here," said the father.

"That suit us," said the son.

"Then what do you want to see me about?"

They exchanged glances again.

"That do seem strange, Mr. Paul and Master Stephen both being drowned," said the father.

"That seem strange. Make a lot of talk," said the son.

"There's always talk about a coincidence like that," said Hugh. "You two are going to stay, then?"

"That suit us," said the father.

"I can get that Ethel King to come back," volunteered the son. "That's simple."

"Who's Ethel King?"

"Housemaid."

"We could do with a cook."

"A cook?" Both men shook their heads.

"Mrs. Grant was fond of Master Stephen," said the son. "Could have had the top brick off her chimney any time he like to ask for it."

"I see. Where do you chaps reckon to get your dinner?"

"At home. We don't feed in the house."

"Good thing, under these circumstances. What are your names?"

"I'm Abel Adams. This is my boy Tom."

"All right, then, Adams."

They clumped off into the garden, but Tom came back almost immediately.

"I see the agent coming up the drive, sir."

"The agent?"

"Ah. That look after the estate and see to the tenants."

"What's his name?"

"Bembridge."

"Oh, yes, of course. Thanks, Tom." He could not help wondering whether the agent also intended handing in his resignation on account of Mrs. Hal—or, of course, because of what appeared to be local superstition concerning the death of young Stephen and, so very little later, of his father.

Tom hesitated before departing.

"Mr. Bembridge, that have taken over the old parsonage. That suit him, and parson, that's glad of the rent."

"The parson? Oh, Lord, yes! I shall have to make his acquaintance, I suppose. Did Mr. Paul Camber go to church?"

"That did. Churchwarden, and read the lessons regular. I wonder to myself they didn't stick in his throat."

“Well, they won’t stick in mine because I’ve no intention of reading them,” said Hugh, who, realising what was behind this outburst, was unprepared to challenge it. “Where does the parson live, now that he’s let the vicarage?”

“In a cottage next but one to the church. Mr. Paul let him have it rent-free. Parson’s a bachelor and have his sister to look after him. That often visit with Mrs. Bembridge.”

Abel put his head in at the door.

“Come you away, Tom. Mr. Camber want to talk to Mr. Bembridge, not to you. Do you hold your tongue, now. Like a nattering old mawther you are!” Abel jerked his head authoritatively and took his son away.

CHAPTER TWO

Rumours

“Ashamed and fearful to appear,
They screen their horrid shapes with the black
hemisphere.”

Abraham Cowley

Hugh waited a moment or two after the departure of the gardeners, before he went round the side of the house and on to the terrace. The agent, a long-legged man of about his own age, got out of an old Ford and came up the steps.

“Mr. Camber? I’m Bembridge. Thought I’d better look you up as soon as possible.”

“Thanks,” said Hugh. “Come on up to the library.” When they were seated, he added, “What can I do for you?”

“It’s rather the other way about. What can I do for *you*, Mr. Camber? I expect you’d like to know how the estate has been managed and run.”

“Well, that can wait for a bit, perhaps. I’ve had excellent reports of you from the lawyers, so I’m more than willing to take things on trust at present. There are other ways in which you can help me. Who are my neighbours, and what are my social obligations towards them? I play golf and I fish, and I can ride a horse. Is there a local hunt, and ought I to join? Where can I get another cook and a housekeeper and some maids?”

“Oh, dear!” Bembridge crossed one leg over the other and lit a cigarette. “It’s—there’s some prejudice, you know.”

“I’ve been told. My younger brother’s widow—Mrs. Hal Camber.”

"Oh, you *do* know." Bembridge looked relieved. "Ethel King could be persuaded. She's dimly related to the Adams, your gardeners. They're staying, I suppose?"

"On condition that Mrs. Hal doesn't take over the management of this house. Why should she, anyway?"

"She was always trying it on with Mr. Paul Camber. He engaged Mrs. Brunton to keep her out. (I'm speaking frankly. You don't mind?) Even so, she used to invite herself and the child for lengthy visits. Her excuse was that Paul must be lonely and that Peter made a companion for Stephen. He didn't, of course, because not only was there four years' difference in their ages, but they were temperamentally incompatible."

"Hm! Anyway, what I need at the moment is a cook."

"Why don't you get the Salaman couple to come up to the house and do the cooking until you get somebody? You'll have to advertise, I suppose. There's no village woman capable of taking on the job in a house of this kind."

"The Salaman couple?"

"Yes. They live at the lodge. Didn't you know your lodge was inhabited by the son and daughter of Jewish refugees?"

"I knew I had tenants there. Artists, I believe."

"Well, that's the Salaman couple. Their parents are dead now. These children were brought out of Nazi Germany when they were about seven years old. They're devoted to one another—at least, the brother is devoted to the sister. I don't know about *her*."

"And they can and will cook?"

"Pleased to, I shouldn't wonder. They paint, and that sort of thing, but they're much in demand as cooks when anybody round here gives a big dinner-party. Glad of the money, of course."

"That relieves me of one headache, then. I'd better make their acquaintance. I suppose they speak English?"

I've very little German."

"Oh, yes, they speak English. Do you want me to take you down there and introduce you?"

"No, it doesn't matter, thanks. As they're my tenants, it will be in order for me to introduce myself. All the same, while you're here, I'd like you to put me wise about one or two things. I've very little idea, at present, of what's expected of me—as a landowner, for example."

"Well, if I may return to the object of my visit, I expect I can tell you anything you want to know. There are matters for which I need your authority before I deal with them. Shall we get them settled now? There are a couple of cottages over which there's a spot of trouble. They fell vacant last summer and I want to put young Deems into one. He's recently married—the girl's father insisted; there's a baby on the way who isn't going to wait much longer—and Deems is a good cowman. He and his wife have been living in an almost derelict railway carriage, so I do want to house them as soon as I can. Trouble is, there's old Mrs. Maidon to consider. Her place is condemned. Then there's another claimant in John Palling."

Hugh listened without comment. At the end of the recital he said:

"Well, I must leave it to you, unless you think I ought to see these people personally."

"That isn't necessary in this case. Of course, if it weren't that the lodge is let, I could put old Mrs. Maidon in there."

"Are the tenants satisfactory?—apart from being able to cook, I mean."

"Quite. Very nice people."

"But I understand they're not here during the winter."

"That doesn't help. I'd still have nowhere for old Mother Maidon to go in the summer."

"No, of course you wouldn't. Look here, I've the glimmerings of a notion about this, but I'll have to wait a week or two to get myself acclimatised. Are there any other points? If not, why don't you come with me into Norwich for lunch? I'm short of a chauffeur, but you may trust my driving, I think."

"Crick left, then?" said Bembridge. "I don't know that I ever really took to that young man. Paul Camber spoilt him horribly, I thought."

"It was because I was expected to follow suit that we parted company."

"I thought it couldn't be because of Mrs. Hal."

"Oh?"

"He was the only person of Paul's household who had a good word to say for her. That's what I meant," Bembridge explained.

"No, it was nothing to do with Mrs. Hal. It was because I did not see any reason why he should use my car for getting home at night and back in the morning."

"My word! You *did* stamp on his vested interests!"

"So I gathered. It wasn't that I minded lending the car, but I think the principle's wrong. It seemed to me the thin end of the wedge. He'd have been joy-riding every time my back was turned."

"Paul used to wink at it. Sometimes..." He hesitated. Hugh, his eyes looking straight ahead, grunted at him to go on. "Sometimes I wonder whether Crick had some hold over Paul, you know."

"Some hold over him?" asked Hugh. "How do you mean?"

"If I knew that, I could be frank with you. The answer is that I *don't* know. Did it strike you as strange that Paul and his boy should have died in the same way, at widely different places but within a short time of one another?"

"I thought of it as a coincidence, and a dreadful one."

"I've sometimes wondered whether Paul committed suicide."

"I've wondered that, but I think it most unlikely. Was there anything to suggest it?"

"So far as knowledge goes, nothing at all. In any case, he is safely under the ground. It would do no good to begin to speculate now. Still, I'm glad you've got rid of Crick."

"I didn't, you know. He got rid of himself. Anyhow, I really don't need a chauffeur. But I do need a cook, and need one badly. I will certainly see what these Salamans have to say. In fact, I'll tell you what's in my mind. But, look, let's go now for lunch. We can talk in the car."

"Yes?" said Bembridge, when they had cleared the park gates and were on the Norwich road. "What had you thought of doing?"

"Well, look, if this Salaman couple are all right, and will help me out, why shouldn't I let them have a wing up at the house? I don't need a place that size all to myself. If they occupied one wing, and kept it clean and so forth, it would help with my servant problem, especially during the winter. I should have to make it a stipulation that they made it their permanent quarters and stayed all the year round, I suppose."

The agent was silent for a moment, thinking it over.

"It would free the lodge for old Mrs. Maidon, of course, and get us over that particular fence," he said. "But the Salaman couple are cosmopolitans. It may be that they wouldn't relish spending the winter in the country. It can be pretty quiet here."

"Yes, well, we should have to find out what they thought. Anyway, I've got to meet them yet. I'm not sure whether cosmopolitans would be the sort of people I should like if I had to meet them every day."

The two men lunched in Norwich, and on the way home Bembridge asked Hugh to take tea with himself and

his wife.

"We live at the old parsonage," he added. "It's a gem of a Queen Anne house and I'd like to show you what we've done with it, if you'd be interested. It took the whale of a lot of doing up when we took it over from the Reverend Arthur Tolley, but, to my mind, the result's rather pleasing."

Mrs. Bembridge turned out to be a kittenish woman of about thirty whose face gained in character rather than in charm when she smiled. Her speech—at any rate, her choice of words—was surprisingly direct and almost naïve.

"You're not much like Paul," she said.

"We were only cousins, you know," said Hugh, "and I believe I take after my mother, whereas Paul was more like our grandfather."

"I'm rather glad you're not like him. Come and meet Catherine Tolley. Catherine, this, as you've just heard, is the new Mr. Camber."

"How do you do?" said the vicar's sister. She was younger than Marion Bembridge, a pleasant, graceful creature with the quiet eyes of a countrywoman and a light, warm handclasp. "I hope you're going to enjoy being at Camber."

"Well, I haven't liked it much, so far, I'm bound to admit. All the servants except a tweeny and the two gardeners walked out on me. Even Mrs. Brunton and the chauffeur have gone. I don't know what wild rumours went ahead of me."

There was the beginning of an awkward pause; then Marion Bembridge exclaimed (in the nick of time, as it seemed to Hugh):

"Servants? Oh, I'll find you some more. Servants never stay long anywhere in these restless times, I'm afraid. Anyway, you need not starve. The Salamans will always do your cooking."

"So your husband tells me."

Hugh enjoyed his visit and was amused by a short but earnest conversation with his hostess at parting.

"I'm glad you're driving Catherine home so that Charles need not. I can see he's tired. You do like Charles, don't you?"

"Very much," said Hugh, who had made up his mind on this point.

"He likes you, too. I can tell that. So will you raise his salary?"

"Well, er..."

"I knew you would. You're not a bit like Paul. He was a horrid sort of person. You must come to tea again soon, and when you do I shall call you Hugh."

"Thank you, Marion."

"That's very nice. And don't worry about Mrs. Hal. I'll help you chase her away."

"I shan't need any help," said Hugh. "Good-bye, and thank you very much for giving me tea. Miss Tolley, are you going to sit with me in front?"

He drove her home to one of the few good cottages in the village and received a grateful wave of the hand from a lanky man who looked up from his gardening at the sound of the car. On his way home, Hugh pulled up just within the lodge gates, sounded his horn, got out, and knocked at the lodge door. A very handsome young woman with a short upper lip, beautiful teeth, and a rather magnificent nose appeared on the threshold.

"Yes?"

"My name's Camber."

"Oh, yes! So nice to have a new one. I am just up-to-date with the rent. Not more. Just up-to-date."

"Oh, of course. I really came to ask whether you and your brother would come and do a bit of cooking for me. You see..."

"Perfectly. That Mrs. Hal who pokes her finger into pies. The servants are all fled. Who blames them? Is she coming to keep house for you?"

"No."

"You will see. Meanwhile, we come to cook. When? Tonight?"

"If you would be so good."

"Is there food?"

"You'd better come up to the house and have a look round."

"No. There will be the usual things, but no meat, and in Norwich the shops will be shut." She turned her head. "Jacob!"

A movement in the tiny passage resolved itself into a slender, black-haired young man, as good-looking as his sister and remarkably like her in appearance.

"Ja, meine Hildegarde?"

"Speak in English. This is the new Mr. Camber. Meet him. He wants us to cook. Tonight, this evening, *now!* We shall take our saddle of mutton. We are not orthodox," she added, for Hugh's information. "So difficult in a village. We eat anything."

"But I can't let you cook your own joint for me!"

"Not so. You shall buy it, then you invite us to eat it with you. If you give us some wine we do it for nothing. A bargain? Yes?"

It was a bargain. The dinner-party was a merry one. Daisy Norgate knew nothing of the contents of the wine-cellar and tearfully refused to go down and investigate, so Jacob explored and came up with two bottles of Beaune.

"Shades of Mrs. Hal, I imagine," said Hugh. "I understand that my cousin was a teetotaller."

"Please?"

"Didn't drink—beer, wines, and spirits, you know, Miss Salaman."

"Hildegarde, please, and Jacob."

"All right, then, Hildegarde. Thank you."

"But that is so strange, we think. We have talked about it often, have we not, Jacob?"

"Better, perhaps, not to talk about it now," said her brother darkly.

"I think I know what you mean," said Hugh. "A rumour reached me. I discounted it. It's incredible, or almost so."

"But why so?" Hildegarde regarded him with her liquid and luminous eyes. "Is it then impossible in England for a boy of fifteen to be drunk and to fall into the water and be drowned?"

"Not necessarily, but I should consider Stephen's to be a special case."

"Because Mr. Paul Camber did not like to drink, must it be that his son did not like to experiment with drinking? I think it is better on the Continent, where children drink wine in a natural manner. There are no pleasures like forbidden pleasures, Mr. Camber."

"Hugh, please. What do you think about that, Jacob?"

Young Salaman was scowling down at his glass. He looked up and shrugged.

"I think," he said, "that Hildegarde should learn when to be silent on some matters. At any rate"—he looked at his glass again—"it seems that Mr. Paul Camber kept wine for his guests."

"Does that mean you haven't dined here before?"

"Of course we have not. Mr. Bembridge accepted us as tenants. Mr. Camber, to him we did not exist, except, perhaps, to pay the rent."

"What about the boy, Stephen?"

"I have talked to him," said Hildegarde, more in response to a glance from her brother, it seemed, than as an answer to Hugh's question. "Not much. Hardly at all. He seemed a nice boy. Very delicate, I think. He was not at school. He had a tutor, a man named Verith."

“Not a good type,” said Jacob. “If Stephen Camber had had a mother to take charge of things, I do not think Verith would have been allowed in this house.”

Hugh was more than interested.

“A bad hat?” he suggested. Jacob shrugged.

“I will go to the kitchen and bring in the next course,” he said. “Come, Hildegarde. I need some help, please.”

Hildegarde made a grimace, but obeyed at once. They were in the kitchen for some time—longer, Hugh suspected, than it had taken to dish up the next course. When they came back, Jacob’s sallow cheeks were flushed and Hildegarde looked petulant. Hugh complimented them upon their cooking and helped himself generously to the food.

“We have been quarrelling,” stated Hildegarde, mollified by Hugh’s evident appreciation of their efforts. “He is a pig of obstinacy.”

“Arguing,” amended Jacob, “not quarrelling. My sister is very difficult.”

“And I’ve been thinking,” said Hugh.

“Yes?” Hildegarde looked at him with innocent, avaricious eyes. “Of something to our advantage?”

“To our mutual advantage, I hope.”

“Stop gobbling your noisy food, Jacob, and listen to Hugh.”

Jacob, who had the table-manners of a prince, shrugged and said:

“You are like a greedy child, Hildegarde. Always, ‘What is for me? What is for me?’ Please, Hugh, you are saying?”

“What do you think of the lodge as a dwelling-house?”

“It is what we can afford—just,” replied the boy.

“With much self-sacrifice,” put in his sister hastily. “You are not going to put a little new paint on the front door and raise the rent?”

"Nothing like that at all. How would you two like to take over the west wing of this house at the same rent?"

"For two shillings a week less," said Hildegarde promptly. "There is much work to be done in the west wing to make it habitable. No—perhaps when I think again, for no rent at all. Then I become your cook-housekeeper for no wage, and Jacob will be the butler."

"Very well. Until I get a cook you can live here rent-free. If you decide to take the west wing, though, it must be a permanent arrangement. You will not spend your winters in London. You will be here all the time. Look, think it over. Let it go until after Christmas. Let's not mention it again until the New Year."

"Why are you making us this so generous offer?" demanded Jacob.

"The truth is that Bembridge has to find a house of some sort for old Mrs. Maidon. Her cottage has to be condemned," said Hildegarde. "There is always a reason for what seems to be kindness."

"So she will have the lodge?" asked Jacob.

"That's it. And now, Jacob, tell me about the tutor Verith."

"I knew very little about him, except that he was bad."

"What sort of bad? Do you mean because he got the girl Beresford into trouble?"

"No, no. I mean his political opinions. He taught the young boy his political opinions."

"Oh, Jacob! Not politics!" said Hugh. "I'm sure I should agree with every word you chose to utter, but don't utter now, there's a good chap. You'll spoil my dinner." He glanced at Hildegarde for support. She smiled.

"Your old Mrs. Thing may have the lodge after Christmas," she said, nodding her dark head vigorously. "But to spend the winter here at Camber, no, not possible. I make up my mind."

"Let's talk it over later," said Hugh.

"Later! Later! Always the compromise! Always the procrastination! So English! So ineffectual! You wait until your Mrs. Hal Camber shall come! Then I laugh!"

"But why, Hildegarde? What's so funny about Mrs. Hal?"

"She is not funny at all. She is like a little beetle in the woodwork. She will nibble and nibble, and then, one fine day, the beams of the roof will fall down."

"The death-watch beetle?"

"The death-watch beetle!" She glanced at her brother. Jacob's face was a mask. He twirled the stem of an empty wine-glass. Hildegarde took it away and nodded to Hugh to re-fill it. "It must come, Jacob. It is silly for you to sulk and to tell me, with your eyes, *Be quiet, be quiet*. Hugh is a good and kind man, and he shall hear the truth. I am older than you and wiser, and I know more about people than you will ever know."

"What *is* all this?" asked Hugh, although he could guess what was coming.

"It is about Paul Camber, and Stephen Camber, and Mrs. Hal, and Verith, and Beresford the farmer, and his daughter's little baby, and—"

"Hildegarde!" shouted Jacob, waving his long, thin hands. "I beseech you! I command you! Silence upon this point! You will be arrested! You are against the law to say such things! I will not defend you if you find yourself in trouble over this!"

Hugh thought it advisable to intervene.

"If Hildegarde means that there are rumours about the illegitimate Beresford baby, I've already heard them," he said calmly. "As to the deaths of my cousin and his son, well, no notice need be taken of what is repeated by the scandal-mongering old women in the village or the nonsense that goes round in the tap-room of the pub." He smiled at Hildegarde. "So I uphold Jacob's opinion. The

less said upon these controversial issues the better. Let's all have some more wine." He raised his glass. "Down with the busy-bodies, including Mrs. Hal!" He drank, and laughed aloud.

"She is one who bobs up," said Hildegarde gloomily. "You will see very soon that I am right. She will bob up and she will push you under. She is without a moral sense and she will be the mistress here before you are knowing what is happening."

"I really doubt it," said Hugh.

CHAPTER THREE

Mrs. Hal

"Cast our caps and cares away;
This is beggars' holiday."

John Fletcher

Mrs. Hal Camber arrived on the seventeenth of October. It was a still, rather cold day, and Hugh had been for a twelve-mile tramp on roads that rang beneath his feet with frost. He came home to be greeted at the lodge by Hildegarde. She hissed rather than spoke.

"She is here!"

"Who?" But he had known, almost before the words were out of her mouth, of whom she spoke.

"It is Mrs. Hal. She makes hay in the sunshine. Already Ethel and Daisy are weeping. What will you do?"

"Sort *her*," said Hugh briefly. He had heard enough—too much—about Mrs. Hal, he decided. She had better be sent about her business. Ready for battle, he went up to the house. Ethel, back in his service, opened the side door. He had knocked at it because his boots were muddy.

"Oh, sir! That happen!"

"I know. Where is Mrs. Hal?"

"That put the drawing-room to rights. I only do it this morning, Mr. Camber, but it seem that isn't satisfied."

"All right, Ethel, I'll see to it."

He gave her his hat and coat and sent her for a pair of shoes. While she was gone he put away his fishing tackle in the gun-room and pushed a pocket-comb through his hair. He changed into the shoes she brought, washed under the kitchen tap, and strode off to encounter his visitor. Mrs. Hal was in the act of trying to decide whether a Chinese horse looked better on the

mantelpiece or in the front of a shelf in the china cabinet. As it was a valuable piece and a favourite of his, Hugh waited until she had made up her mind, and the horse was safely out of her hands, before he spoke.

"Ah," he said, rather loudly. Mrs. Hal spun round. She was as he had supposed—small, svelte, and wearing a Dresden-china make-up. She clattered over the polished floor on five-inch heels.

"Hugh! Hugh *darling*! I was *devastated* when they told me you were not at home. How *are* you, you dear boy?"

"How do you do, Héloïse?" (Christened Elsie, he had always thought.)

"My *dear*, I don't do at all! Peter is back at school and I feel *devastated* without him."

"I suppose so, yes. Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, of course, poor dear! You've been out walking and you feel tired. Well, I'm not going to make myself a nuisance. I've given Ethel full instructions about my room. You don't need to trouble about me at all."

"That's as well. Might be a godsend. Can you cook?"

"Cook?"

"Yes."

"But, darling, why *should* I cook?"

"Because the cook and the housekeeper have both left."

"Oh, Hugh, don't be such a tease! You know I can't cook. Stop joking and tell me all about yourself. What you've been doing, and what it feels like to be the master of Camber, and *everything*."

"Look, Héloïse, let's get one thing straight. I'm a bachelor of forty. You're a widow of—well, a good bit less than that, of course. You don't really think I'm going to have you stay the night, do you?"

"My *dear* Hugh! What *are* you suggesting?"

"That you take tea with me and then hop it."

"But how ridiculous! What *does* it matter what people say?"

"A good deal to me. One cannot be a respected and highly respectable Civil Servant for twenty years without learning to bow to the force majeure of public opinion, you know."

"Village gossip? Really, Hugh!"

"I'm very sorry, but there it is. *You* may have been married, but I have not, and I hold the cautious opinion of spinsters of uncertain age when it comes to risking my reputation. No, my dear girl, the fact that you married my brother cannot gloss over the other fact that you and I are in no sense related by any tie of blood. Therefore, I insist that your repose must be under some other roof than mine."

He was aware, as he was speaking, of being in the presence of a small, human bomb, a bomb, moreover, which was quivering. He sat back, waiting for the explosion. The bomb, however, turned into a damp squib.

"Well," said Mrs. Hal, "perhaps I'd better ask you to ring for tea. I have sent away the taxi which brought me here, so perhaps Crick can drive me into Norwich."

Hugh shook his head.

"Not even that," he said. "Crick's gone, too. But don't worry. I can drive you to Thorpe Station myself. It will be a pleasure."

Whether the double meaning of the last remark was clear to Mrs. Hal he could not determine. All that she said was:

"What *have* you been doing, to alienate the servants like this?"

"I've no idea, but they folded their tents like the Arabs and—there it is!"

"I don't understand it at all, but I *should* like a cup of tea!"

Hugh got up and rang the bell. The parlour-maid appeared with such suspicious promptness that he guessed her ear had not been far from the keyhole.

"Could you bring Mrs. Hal Camber some tea, Gertrude, please? Oh, and you'll find a bottle of whisky in the dining-room. Bring that, too, and a jug of water."

"Whisky!" Mrs. Hal gave a shrill laugh. "Paul would turn in his grave!"

"No doubt."

"You heard about poor little Stephen?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Hugh, you *are* uncommunicative. And there are things I'm *dying* to talk to you about. Look, as you're so prudish about having me in the house, what about your coming to see me at my poor little flat?"

"Well, not just at present, anyway, thanks. I've got to learn my way about here at Camber, you know. I expect to be talking a lot of business with Bembridge."

"I don't like Bembridge. I'm sure he didn't give Paul all the money from the sale of that timber they cut down two years ago. You don't know how I miss those dear old oak trees. The park doesn't look the same without them. Do you remember them, Hugh?"

"Vaguely. I believe I used to climb them when I was a boy and spent a holiday here with Paul. Hal came with me, I remember."

"Now that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Not about Hal, exactly, but about Hal's son."

"And yours?"

"Don't be silly, Hugh! I'm not sure I like that sort of joke."

"I did not intend to joke. I know what you mean, and, as the answer to the question you wish to put to me seems, at the moment, pretty obvious, you'll forgive me if I...Ah, here's tea. Hullo, Gertrude! Who made those cakes?"

"Daisy's mother knock us up a few, sir, so, as you have company, we think perhaps you like to sample them."

"Very kind of you. I'm sure Mrs. Hal appreciates the thought. And the whisky? Splendid. You wouldn't prefer some whisky and water, Héloïse?"

"No, thank you. I thought whisky was still in short supply."

"Not if you know where to look for it. Tell Daisy I am much obliged to her mother, Gertrude."

The maid disappeared. Mrs. Hal poured herself out a cup of tea and Hugh helped himself to the whisky. Conversation languished for some minutes until Mrs. Hal observed, in the tone of one who resumes an interrupted conversation:

"I sometimes think Peter has rather the look of *you*, Hugh."

"Oh, come! Give the poor little blighter a chance!"

"No, but really! After all, you're a very good-looking man. Not handsome, exactly, but what I call masculine."

"Heavens! I hope so!"

"Firm and strong. Full of character," pursued Mrs. Hal, ignoring the exclamation. "If Peter grows up to be like you, I, for one, shall not think I have wasted my life. Hugh, an idea!"

"Yes?"

"I quite understand your bachelor shyness about having, as you say, a young woman—for I *am* a young woman, widow or no widow, am I not?—under your roof, but you *could* have Peter for part of his holidays, if you liked. He *needs* a man's handling, Hugh—my poor, little fatherless bairn."

"I expect he gets it at school."

"It isn't the same thing. Oh, Hugh, it would be such a *treat* for him! I do want him to get to *know* Camber. After all, it *is* the family seat."

"I don't care much for children. In any case, as I tell you, I can do nothing until I've found my feet here. You'll appreciate that everything is still very new to me at present. Have one of these cakes—or do you prefer more bread and butter?"

"Listen, Hugh!"

"It's of no use, Héloïse. If I find I can have Peter here for a week of his school holidays I'll certainly write and invite him, but please don't regard that as any sort of definite promise. I'll have far more use for Peter when he's twenty-five or so."

"If you're alive to know him then! After all, Hugh, we must face facts, and the facts are that out of three apparently healthy men, you are the only one left."

"Thanks for the reminder, but I really must point out that neither Paul nor Hal died in his bed. Their apparent health had nothing to do with the matter."

"Really, Hugh, there's no need to mention *Hal*!" She put down her cup and produced a very small handkerchief edged with black. "It's not very kind of you, is it?"

"Kindness does not enter into the question. You threatened me with death, and I assumed, in my charitable fashion, that you meant natural death."

"Well, of course I did!" She put the handkerchief away. "I was only mentioning something that we all have to come to. Am I to be blamed for thinking of my son's interests?"

"Certainly not, but his interests are hardly mine. Having come into the property, I must express a preference for wishing to enjoy it for a few years and not to be faced immediately with the thought that sooner or later I have to establish a successor."

Héloïse sipped her tea and there was a lengthy pause. Hugh helped himself to more whisky.

"What do *you* think happened to poor little Stephen?" Mrs. Hal demanded, so suddenly that Hugh had the

feeling that she meant to take him off his guard.

"Stephen? No idea. There seems to be a legend that he had managed to get hold of some drink," he said, speaking easily.

"But, Hugh, that *can't* be right! Paul was a rabid teetotaller."

"May have had an unfortunate effect on the kid. I always think it a mistake to be rabidly *anything* when you've got to bring up a boy, especially a rather introspective, sensitive boy, such as I believe Stephen to have been."

"I thought you didn't care for children, Hugh, darling. How do *you* know that poor little Stephen was introspective?"

Hugh grinned. "I don't," he said, very cheerfully. "Well, Héloïse, cheers! And now, you really must go. I've oceans to do before I go to my rest—and, by that, I don't mean 'to my grave.'"

The weeks passed. Hugh did, indeed, find a great deal to do. He was a quietly energetic man who enjoyed being fully occupied. The news that Mrs. Hal had been routed and put to flight was gleefully passed on by the simple-minded Ethel King, but her fellow-servants of former days, either because they had found congenial occupation or for some other reason, did not answer any of Hugh's advertisements. Others, however, did ask for interviews—others who knew nothing of the Camber tragedies. A cook and two more housemaids were installed, the faithful Daisy was promoted, with (it followed) an increase in pay, and Gertrude, the head parlour-maid, was permitted to bring her younger sister to work under her. No housekeeper was appointed, although the servants had a tacit agreement with Hugh that they did not accept orders from Hildegarde.

"I shall be doing very little entertaining," Hugh explained to the new cook on her first day, "so I shall leave the catering in your hands, Mrs. Daddle. You will show me the books every Friday. I am accustomed to figures and shall check yours very carefully."

"I've a character for honesty, sir."

"I know. I've read it. It's not honesty I'm referring to, but wastefulness. I should not have given you employment if I suspected that you were an embryo jail-bird."

"Really, sir!"

"Just reasonable care, Mrs. Daddle, is all I look for—and curry on Fridays. I am partial to curry. I trust it forms part of your repertoire?"

"Not Akbar nor yet the Shah Jehan couldn't complain of my curries, Mr. Camber, but the barmy duck will have to be ordered in London."

"Bombay duck. And where did you hear of Akbar and the Shah Jehan?"

"I went to school, like others."

"I congratulate your teachers. I think you and I will suit one another very well, Mrs. Daddle. What is your opinion on the matter?"

"I don't stop where I'm not suited, sir. I have my independence."

"Excellent. So I shall never have need to wonder whether you are happy in your work. I wish everybody had the commonsense that you, Mrs. Daddle, appear to possess."

"How are you on puddings, sir?"

"I dislike almost all of them. Give me a savoury and a dish of fresh fruit to follow."

"The kitchen is inclined to favour puddings, sir."

"Then see that the kitchen does not want for them. One man's meat is another man's poison, after all."

The weeks again went by. Hugh became a subscriber to, although not at first a follower of, the local hunt. He became, for the first time since he was fifteen, a churchgoer. He lectured to the Women's Institute on *Some Secrets of Whitehall* and kicked off for the sanguinary battle between the village eleven and their rivals, the neighbouring village of Todgrassy. He even agreed to attend the Christmas Tea for Old Folks.

Ethel, her star still in the ascendant as one of the Old Faithfuls in his service, broached the matter of Christmas leave. She had come in to dust the library at an unusual time—half-past three in the afternoon.

"I thought you did this in the mornings, Ethel."

"Yes, sir." She continued to flick around the outside of a mahogany bookcase.

"Anything up?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, come on. Let's have it. Confession is said to be good for the soul. I should have thought it a most mortifying experience myself. I suppose it depends upon one's upbringing."

Ethel paused in her labours. "It was about Christmas, sir."

"Ah, I thought you had a furtive look. And what about Christmas, may I ask?"

"You wouldn't be going away for Christmas, sir, I take it?"

Hugh was a kind-hearted man.

"I begin to perceive your drift, Ethel," he said. "I could go to my London club, if that would suit the convenience of the staff. Er—what amount of licence is customary on these occasions?"

"Christmas Day and come back the morning after Boxing Day would be appreciated, sir, I'm sure. Not that we had it with Mr. Paul, but us thought you might be different."

"So be it. You can let the others know. No nonsense about running a fancy dress ball for the village and holding it in the long gallery here, or any similar orgy, mind. Everybody who doesn't take leave of absence must stay put in a reasonable sort of way."

"Oh, yes, sir! Thank you very much, I'm sure, sir. Cook and them *will* be pleased."

"I'd better leave the address and telephone number of my club, and then, if anything does go wrong, you can let me know."

The Salaman couple did not keep Christmas. The Bembridges went off to Scotland for some ski-ing and invited Hugh to go with them, but he preferred to stay at his club. He had just spent a couple of hours on Christmas Eve afternoon with a book in the club smoking-room when the blow fell. A telephone call came through. It was from Jacob.

"We must be instructed, Hugh, please. What shall we do with Mrs. Hal?"

"How do you mean, Jacob?"

"She is here to spend Christmas. Nobody wants her."

"To spend Christmas? But she hasn't been invited! Doesn't she know I'm not there?"

"We have told her. She has brought the little boy."

"The devil she has!"

"She has ordered Ethel to prepare rooms, therefore Ethel will not take the Christmas leave, so she is most indignant."

"No wonder! All right, Jacob. Thanks for letting me know."

Hugh went back to the smoking-room and took time for one cigarette before making up his mind what to do. Then he rang up Camber Abbey. The parlour-maid answered the telephone.

"Ask Mrs. Hal to be good enough to speak to me, Gertrude."

"Very good, sir."

"Ah, Héloïse! The compliments of the season! I'm so sorry to be away from home just at this time. If you'd let me know you had nowhere to go for Christmas, I might have fixed you up at an hotel."

"But, Hugh, surely..."

"No," said Hugh, interrupting promptly and firmly, "I can't do a thing at present, and the servants will be scattered to the four winds as from this evening. I've given them Christmas leave. So, unless you want to cook your own goose—no metaphor intended—you will have to return home." He chuckled as he heard the receiver slammed down at the other end. He went back to the smoking-room and lit another cigarette. When he had tossed the butt end into the cheerful fire he went back to the club telephone and called Camber again. Again Gertrude answered it.

"No matter what happens, Gertrude, the domestic staff will take the holiday I have promised them."

"We plan to go tonight, sir. Me as well. I've been invited to Cook's sister's in Norwich."

"Excellent. Just carry on, as per plan."

"But Mrs. Hal, sir? That seem to think we should stay."

"Mrs. Hal will manage, Gertrude."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"You understand?"

"I understand, and thank you again, sir."

"Gertrude!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I don't like Mrs. Hal any more than you do."

"A Merry Christmas, sir."

"It looks as though your wish for me will come true. Remember, Gertrude, the leave has been granted and all arrangements have been made."

"I quite understand, sir."

He returned home on the morning following Boxing Day to be given an unpleasant surprise. Mrs. Hal and Peter were still in occupation of Camber. Mrs. Hal was gushing; Peter, a small, rather wizened, pale child, was painfully silent. He seemed to be summing Hugh up.

"So here I am, you see," said Mrs. Hal brightly.

"Yes, yes, I do see. You have been managing for yourself, I take it."

"With Daisy's help. It was really very inconsiderate of you, Hugh, to put the servants on board wages just at Christmas time; but I managed. We old campaigners, you know!"

"You mean that Daisy didn't go home for Christmas?"

"Well, darling boy, how could she? I had to have *somebody's* help!"

Hugh was furiously angry but did his best to disguise the fact. He was successful.

"Then I must trouble you to recompense her," he said equably. "You see, she was on board wages, which meant that she should not have been in the house at all, let alone be asked to do any work in it."

"That is not the meaning of board wages, Hugh."

"It is *my* meaning. I compute that you owe Daisy at least..."

"Don't be silly, Hugh! I shall pay her nothing!"

"I did not think you would, but the fact that you will not pay her does not resolve the debt. How much longer had you thought of staying?"

"Well, it's very kind of you, Hugh. I shall, of course, give Daisy a present."

"That will be very nice for her to show her mother. As Daisy has not been home for Christmas I must make shift without her for a bit. As, without Daisy's help, the kitchen staff will refuse to function, there seems nothing for it but for me to go back to my club. In any case, I am thinking of selling Camber."

“*Selling* it! Oh, Hugh, you couldn’t do that!”

“Why not? It is far too big for me.”

“But it’s my son’s inheritance!”

“Nonsense, Héloïse. It isn’t entailed. It is the property of the owner and—I dislike stressing the point—I *am* the owner.”

He sat back and watched her.

“You mean,” she said, at last, “you don’t want Peter and me here?”

“Regrettably but decisively, no, Héloïse, I do not. I am a misogynist and a recluse by nature, and the society of women and children is abhorrent to me. I hope you will pardon this frankness, but we must understand one another, I feel.”

“I fully understand *you*! You are the most selfish, callous, cold-blooded, loveless man I ever met! You have no sense of family, no sense of your obligations! I shall go *at once*, and take *your heir* with me!”

She swept out and Hugh could hear her calling for Peter. She came in again to say good-bye, to find Hugh staring out of the window at a thin, fine rain.

“I’ll drive you to the station,” he said briefly. Mrs. Hal maintained an offended silence. Hugh bought the tickets and a bundle of magazines for her. Then he drove back to Camber and presented the astonished Daisy with five pounds.

“I am truly sorry you missed your Christmas, Daisy,” he said. “Perhaps you’d like to take next week-end instead?”

“Me, sir? Oh, no, sir, thank you. It only mean me doing the washing and the cooking and the scrubbing and the shopping instead of my mother, sir. I was *glad* to miss Christmas at home.”

“Well, well!” said Hugh. “How true it is that the one half doesn’t know how the other half lives!”

“Yes, sir. Thank you for the five pounds, but I don’t see why you give me all that much. I only do a bit of cooking and cleaning for Mrs. Hal, and look after the little boy for her.”

“Not only did you do all that for Mrs. Hal, Daisy. You have performed for me an inestimable service.”

“Me, sir?”

“You, Daisy. You have rid me of an incubus, and, I hope, once and for all.”

“I don’t understand, sir.”

“Well, Daisy, it is so much more satisfactory to express a righteous indignation in support of the oppressed than to indicate in an unsociable manner that one prefers one’s own company to that of one’s nearest relations.”

Daisy studied him with bovine thoughtfulness, then, with a sigh of utter incomprehension, she shook her head and went away.

CHAPTER FOUR

Anonymous Spite

“Good speed, for I this day
Betimes my matins say,
Because I do
Begin to woo.”

Robert Herrick

In spite of his previous declarations, Hugh found himself reading the Lessons at church on every third Sunday. He also found himself made president of the village football club, but, as this office involved him in nothing more personal than finding an annual subscription, he preferred it to the other except for one thing. His acquaintanceship with the vicar's sister had flourished. They had met on several occasions and their friendship deepened every time he met her. He soon found himself contriving to meet her—at first as though the encounters were accidental. By the end of March he had taken her twice to lunch in Norwich, for several jaunts in his car and once to an evening performance at the Maddermarket.

It was such a novel and delightful experience for him to have a woman friend that he found himself confiding more and more in her as the friendship deepened. He gave her an account of all the rumours, remarks, and innuendoes he had heard concerning the deaths of Paul and Stephen and the conduct of Verith; he also told her, with some humour, the story of the abortive visits of Héloïse Camber to the family seat.

“Of course, as things stand at present, I suppose her son *is* your heir,” said Catherine thoughtfully.

“Not necessarily; and, supposing that I should marry, a most unlikely supposition,” said Hugh. His own words

startled him. What hidden wish had suddenly swum to the surface of his mind he had no idea. He glanced at the girl. They had been headed for the bleak sea-marshes of the northern coast of the county, but, at Fakenham, Catherine had decided that she wanted to see Castle Rising and its Norman church. It was this which had precipitated matters and that for an unexpected reason.

The stern tower-keep was deserted. They mounted the impressive stone staircase of the forebuilding and found themselves in what they supposed to be the chapel. A narrow opening gave on to the gallery of the great hall, whose wooden floor had disappeared, so that they could look down into the vast undercroft, once devoted to stores and guardrooms.

"I'm glad Camber isn't a castle," said Hugh, following his companion along the gallery to inspect two small retiring-rooms at the further end. "An Elizabethan manor built on the ruins of a medieval abbey is eerie enough at times, but this vast barracks...!"

They had turned to come out of the second of the tiny, stone-built chambers when Catherine, who was leading, stopped so abruptly that Hugh almost fell over her.

"Look!" she said. "Whatever is it?"

Hugh came level with her. She caught his sleeve, an instinctive gesture of asking for his protection. He recognised it, and his heart leapt in his breast. The next second he realised that she would have done the same, in her moment of panic, to any companion, man or woman, who had happened to be there.

The reason for her sudden fright was obvious. In the narrow opening from the chapel on to the gallery stood a white figure.

"The castle ghost, obviously," said Hugh, himself a little startled by the phenomenon, although he felt sure it had a rational explanation. "Stay here, while I sort it out."

He strode forward and as he drew nearer to the apparition its contours broadened and changed. By some extraordinary chance, possibly because workmen called in to effect some minor repairs to the chapel had white-washed walls behind the narrow opening, there had come this ghostly effect. Hugh turned to call encouragingly to the girl, and found her almost at his elbow.

"I couldn't let you face it alone," she said; and by that simple remark set the seal on their new relationship, so that on the way home the conversation took a turn which Hugh had not consciously planned.

"...I suppose her son *is* your heir?"

"Not necessarily; and, supposing that I should marry..."

"Let's go back by way of Ely," Catherine interrupted him crudely, aware of the glance which had followed the words. She felt suddenly panic-stricken. Hugh, however, plucked up enough courage to continue the surprising speech he had begun.

"I've never thought of marriage before," he said. "But, then, I've never had a responsibility like Camber before. It needs a mistress."

"Oh, dear! Is that your only reason for thinking of marriage?" asked Catherine, laughing because she was embarrassed. Unlike Hugh, she had often thought of marriage, preferably with him.

"Well, no. The reason is mainly personal. As a matter of fact, since meeting you I've begun to feel rather lonely."

"That's not exactly a compliment."

"Yes, it is," said Hugh. "You go on thinking about it, if you will, and you'll end by seeing what I mean."

He did not refer to the subject again until he set her down at her garden gate.

"Good night," she said. "Thank you for a very lovely day. I didn't realise that life was just a bit dull before you

came.”

“Do you mean that, Catherine?”

“Of course. Good night, Hugh.”

“Good night.” He drove home feeling exhilarated and yet content, a pleasantly mixed mood which was not violently upset even when he read the solitary missive which had been placed on the hall table. It was in an unlettered hand and informed him that Mrs. Hal had been knocked down by a car and, although not on the danger list, would be in hospital for some little time and had supplied the writer (“which I am, and oblige, Mrs. Hicks as cleans the flat daily,”) with Hugh’s address. Mrs. Hicks had instructions, it appeared, to write to him, tell him of the accident, and beg him to take charge of Peter at Camber until Mrs. Hal was up and about again.

“*Damn Héloïse!* She’s done this on purpose!” thought Hugh, uncharitably; but it did not occur to him to refuse the request. He set off early on the following morning and brought the boy back with him, leaving a note for Héloïse which the daily help might take to the hospital. He also paid her wages which, she hinted, were more than overdue, a statement which Hugh had no difficulty in crediting.

“There you are, you see!” said Catherine, when she was apprised of the arrangements. “Now you’ll get really fond of the poor little chap with his mother out of the way.”

“He’s a pallid, puling sort of brat,” said Hugh. “I thought he boarded at a prep school, but it turns out that he’s only a day-boy. I shall send him to the village school here, I think, unless”—he grinned suddenly—“you’d like to take him on and teach him. He’s used to a woman’s tender care. Wouldn’t you like to be his governess? I could easily fix you up a school-room at Camber and transport you every day in the car. What do you say?”

"Don't be silly! But I'd love to come over to Camber and see him."

"Very well. You and your brother come to dinner tomorrow evening."

"Surely little Peter doesn't stay up to dinner!"

"Why on earth shouldn't he?"

"Didn't you say he was only ten or eleven years old?"

"What's that got to do with it? My great-grandfather was putting in a twelve-hour working day when he was ten! That's why he was able to leave my grandfather with a fortune."

"You are quite ridiculous. In any case, I should have thought you'd be glad to get rid of the little boy in the evenings."

"Oh, he likes staying up to dinner. It's about the only thing he does like, as far as I can see. Make it lunch instead of dinner, if you like."

"Arthur won't come to lunch. He says that lunching out interrupts his work. All right. We'll come to dinner. What is the new cook like?"

"Big, bold, and brassy."

"Her cooking, stupid!"

"A very wifely epithet!"

"Don't be silly!"

"I mean it. Why shouldn't we?" said Hugh.

"Why shouldn't we what?"

"Marry. You haven't anybody else in mind, have you?"

"How do you know? Besides, what would poor Arthur do?"

"I shall provide him with a secretary, likewise a cook."

"You're quite ridiculous."

"Oh, well, I suppose my age is against me, and that's why you are turning me down."

"It isn't that at all."

"All right. See you later, then. I'll come over at six and pick you both up. Mind you're ready. I loathe waiting for

people.”

The dinner was not much of a success. The Reverend Arthur was so silent that Hugh felt certain Catherine had told him of the proposal of marriage; the child Peter was forcibly retired from the table when he declared that he felt sick; Catherine had a headache—a fairly sure sign that she had had a wearing day—and Hugh himself soon wished for nothing so much as for the meal to be over, his guests back in their own home, and himself in the library with his slippers on, a pipe going, and a new detective story to read.

He did not see Catherine on the following day. As the child seemed listless and out-of-sorts he felt he ought to be with him in case the doctor was needed. He was feeling bored and a little out-of-sorts himself, but it occurred to him that he ought to ring up the hospital. He was glad when he had done so, for he was told that Mrs. Hal’s injuries were not serious and that she would be discharged at the end of the following week. During the whole of the telephone conversation, Peter sat on the floor and drummed his heels on the carpet. Hugh found him an unlovable child, but was persuaded that he missed his mother.

“Uncle Hugh,” said the boy, as Hugh put down the receiver, “why was Stephen drowned?”

“I don’t know.”

“Darling says somebody gave him some wine or even whisky.”

“Who’s Darling?” Hugh was not prepared to discuss the circumstances of Stephen’s death with the child.

“She likes me to call her Darling.”

“But you don’t wear velvet suits with lace collars or have a grandfather who’s an earl, do you?”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“Everything. The hospital says you can go home to your mother tomorrow week.”

"I don't want to. I like it here. After all, I write to her every day."

"I shall take you home in the car and we'll have lunch out."

"I'm sick when I have lunch out, and I'm sick when I go in cars."

"Pity."

"Why?"

"You'll miss such a lot of fun when you're a man. Why don't you write a letter to your mother saying you're glad she's so much better and that you're looking forward to seeing her again?"

"I don't want to see her again."

"Too bad. Well, I'm going out in the car right now. Do you want to go into the kitchen and see whether Cook has something good for you?"

"Where are you going in the car?"

"Oh, just out and about."

"With that woman who came to dinner?"

"Very possibly."

"Are you going to marry her?"

"See my last answer, old man. Your guess, at present, is as good as mine. Do caramels make you sick?"

"No."

"Splendid. You'll find some on the hall table. Go and grab them and then go along and ask Cook if she'll have you in the kitchen for a bit this afternoon."

"If you say so."

The child went off and Hugh got out the car and drove to the vicar's cottage. The incumbent was again busy in the long front garden.

"Spring around the corner? Looking for the blue-bird?" asked Hugh. The vicar thrust his garden fork into a flowerbed.

"Camber," he said, "are your intentions honourable?"

Hugh was about to take this preposterous question seriously when the broad smile with which he was confronted disarmed him.

"My dear chap, I'm afraid they are," he said. The vicar put out his hand.

"All the luck in the world. She's a girl in a thousand," he said. "I was a surly brute the other night at the thought of losing her. I'm sorry. After all, I myself may marry some day."

"One thing," said Hugh, "it isn't as though we were going to live at the other end of the earth."

At this moment Catherine came out to them.

"What are you two shaking hands about?" she enquired.

"I was thanking Camber—Hugh, I suppose I must call him—for taking my sister off my hands."

"You're a bit premature, Arthur dear. I haven't accepted him yet."

"Come for a drive, and I'll pop the question again," suggested Hugh.

During the next few days, wind of the engagement blew through the village. Hugh drove his fiancée into Norwich to choose the ring. Young Peter received a pound note and a new shilling with which to celebrate, and the day of his return to London came, from his point of view, all too soon. Hugh drove a morose and whining youngster to Mrs. Hal's flat.

She thanked him gushingly for seeing after her child, remarked upon how well Peter was looking and how much he had grown during the short time in Norfolk, and gave Hugh tea. Just as he was ready to drive home she produced a piece of paper which bore signs of having been crumpled up and then smoothed out again.

"I don't know whether there's any point in bothering you with this rubbish, Hugh, dear," she said, "but perhaps you'll tell me whether I ought to do anything about it—"

whether you'd *like* me to. It doesn't mention any names, but, as it was sent to me in hospital, it seems as though it's referring somehow to you."

Hugh took what she held out—a sheet of notepaper bearing a well-known water-mark. On it had been pasted words cut from a magazine to form the message: *How could you bear to trust your child to that man you know he is a killer think of that other boy.*

"Dear me!" said Hugh. "Did you keep the envelope?"

"My first instinct, as you can see, was to throw the stupid thing away, so I've no idea what happened to the envelope. Were you thinking the name and address on it were handwritten? They were, as a matter of fact."

"I was also thinking of the post-mark. Well, I don't think there's much need to worry. Some thwarted, spiteful spinster, I should say. Probably somebody who'd been discharged from the hospital soon after you'd got there. I expect you talked to the other patients, didn't you?"

"Well, of course. But I can't think who—Still, if it's just that, I'll burn the silly paper and forget all about it."

Hugh had given the opinion he genuinely held, except that he had suppressed part of it. This part was that he thought Mrs. Hal had angered another patient and that this patient, as soon as she was discharged from hospital, had decided to create alarm and despondency in Mrs. Hal's breast by attempting to appeal to a sick mother's natural anxiety for her child. He had put the matter clean out of his mind long before he reached Wymondham on his return journey and therefore was entirely unprepared, during the following week, for the disclosure by Catherine that she also had received an anonymous communication, presumably from the same source. Her message ran: *Ask your boy-friend where he was and what he was doing when those two were drowned he is a dirty murderer.*

"I rather like the expression 'boy-friend,' you know," said Hugh, speaking lightly to hide his dismay. "It seems to renew my youth."

"Who sent it, Hugh? Have you any idea?"

"No. I didn't tell you, because there didn't seem any point at the time, but Héloïse had one of these beastly things. She showed it me when I took Peter back."

"Hugh, I don't like it very much. It must be someone living in the village and I thought I knew them all."

"Look, don't worry. If there's an anonymous lunatic at work, there will be shoals of these letters. I'll probably get one myself. All we have to do is to collect the things and hand them over to the police. That's all there is to it."

"But I don't want to think that one of our villagers is crazy enough to do a thing like this."

"I remember we had a case in the Service once. Turned out to be a poor little Temporary who'd lost his wife, hadn't told any of us, and who was just going quietly insane. Luckily, we got a psychologist to look at him before we thought of telling the police, and she soon sorted things out. If you like, I'll get hold of her again."

"She? Her? I thought these people were always men."

"This one isn't. We had Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley on the job. I'm glad we did, because, instead of poor Smith being arrested on a charge of uttering an obscene libel, or what-have-you, he was taken care of in Dame Beatrice's psychiatric clinic and emerged the same decent little man we'd always known."

Only a very few days elapsed before Hugh himself received a message (as he had prophesied), from the same unknown hand. This time the writer struck a rather different note. The suggestion was: *Them two did ought to be dug up then people would know you you foot-and-mouth disease you.*

Hugh examined the missive very carefully and then scanned the envelope. This was addressed in an

unformed hand and was postmarked Newmarket. The postmark on Catherine's letter had been Marks Tey and on the next one she received the postmark was Thetford. This message ran: *You are a har lot*, the final letter of the word "hard" having been inked over so that a word unlikely to be found in a magazine had resulted.

The next message went to Catherine's brother and was postmarked Colchester. It asked: *How dare you let a decent girl marry a man with murder upon his soul what a pity they did away with hanging do you want to be connected with the criminal classes you are no better than a devil your deeds will smell and not of roses so beware.*

Hugh saw the letter and thought it was time to act. He discussed the situation with Arthur and Catherine Tolley, but both were against Hugh's suggestion that the letters ought to be submitted to the police.

"Somebody in the village must be writing them. What we must do is to find the culprit ourselves," said Arthur. Hugh's counter-suggestion that they should call in Dame Beatrice was also vetoed.

"Where on earth could she begin?" asked Arthur. "There are two hundred people in the village and, so far, we haven't the slightest idea of where to begin to look!"

"Very well," said Hugh. "There are other ways of going about things. You don't mind if I keep all these letters?"

CHAPTER FIVE

Two Deaths by Drowning

"And then thou and I'll pick poppies and them steep
In wine, and drink on't even till we weep,
So shall we smoothly pass away in sleep."

Andrew Marvell

"I know only the village gossip and the talk at the inquest," said the Reverend Arthur. "And we are not at cross purposes, Camber. I am as anxious as you are to trace the source of the letters and get them stopped. Some soul is in mortal sickness."

"Sickness of soul? You may be right, but it doesn't strike me like that. Somebody very disagreeable is up to something nasty. That's all I see. What it is I don't yet know, but I *shall* know. Now, then, please tell me what you can."

"It was all right—everything was all right, so far as the rest of us knew—until the truth about Verith came out. That seemed to set matters going. At least, that is what I've thought since. There was a certain amount of scandal, of course, but it was kept down to a minimum by the girl's father, Beresford, a sensible, reasonable sort of man, although not one of my flock."

"I've met Beresford."

"Verith seems to have decided to try to brave things out for a bit, but he soon gave in and, since his dismissal, we've really heard nothing about him."

"He very definitely refused to marry the girl, I hear."

"He refused, yes."

"What kind of girl is she?"

"Educated rather better than one would expect."

“Why do you say that? Beresford’s a farmer—and fairly prosperous, I take it.”

“I see what you mean. All right, then. Let’s put it this way: she was not the type, either by birth or education, I would have said, to have put herself or her family in such an equivocal position.”

“Fair enough. That means that she relied on this fellow to marry her. I wonder why he wouldn’t?”

“That’s his business, I suppose. Anyway, after Verith left Camber Abbey, the boy, Stephen Camber, seems to have been at a pretty loose end.”

“Yes, I’ve heard he took to going long, lonely walks and so forth. What interests me far more is how he came to get drowned.”

“It didn’t happen near here, you know. It happened in a deep cut, miles away, which joins the Bure not far from St. Benet’s Abbey. Some men who had been working there pulled the boy out. They said he had been staggering about in a queer sort of way, as though he was drunk, but they thought it no business of theirs. Then they lost sight of him behind some bushes and took no more notice until their work took them round the next bend and they saw him in the water. By then it was too late to do anything to save his life, although they seem to have done their best.”

“Very strange. And what about Paul?”

“I know nothing except what I read in the papers. It happened in Scotland when he was salmon-fishing, as you probably know. He seems to have been alone at the time. It was said to be accidental death, but—he was greatly attached to Stephen.”

Hugh made up his mind. He had a theory that truthfulness sometimes pays. Moreover, he understood his own people, for, after all, he was of Norfolk stock. He knew the apparently slow, apparently suspicious reactions of his countrymen; he knew, too, their

independent cast of mind and the democratic nature of their thoughts. Touching the hat to the squire might be an act of courtesy in Norfolk, but it was never one of subservience. He would put this basic theory to the test. On the day following his conversation with Arthur he called at the inn.

“Look here, Ted,” he said to the landlord, who was lounging against the counter immersed in a newspaper, “is there anybody a bit touched around these parts who might think it worthwhile to write me anonymous letters—rather nasty ones?”

The landlord put down the paper with obvious reluctance and appeared to collect his thoughts.

“What will it be, Mr. Camber?”

“Scotch. Have one yourself.”

“I don’t drink so early, sir, I thank you.” He placed a double whisky in front of his customer and indicated the siphon. “And now, what were you saying?”

“What do the people about here think and say about the drownings?”

The landlord picked up a glass and began to polish it.

“Mr. Paul wasn’t much liked around here,” he said. Hugh sipped his whisky and added another infinitesimal squirt of soda.

“So what?” he asked. The landlord put down the glass he had polished and picked up another.

“Mr. Paul never come in here,” he said. “I had nothing to do with him.”

Hugh nodded.

“So I’ve heard,” he said. “Nothing doing at the Abbey either. That’s no concern of mine. The point is, what about *me*? I’ve had these letters, you see, and I don’t much care about them.”

“Nobody here have anything against you, Mr. Camber. That I know, but I don’t know any more.”

"But what about the deaths, Ted? What was said at the time?"

"There was some talk. That did seem queer, both of them being drowned and so close together and so far apart, as you might say."

"Close together in time and far apart in place? Yes, I grant you that. It certainly *was* queer. But this is the point: why should I be getting letters suggesting—no, it's more than suggesting—affirming that I murdered them?"

The landlord stared at him.

"Murdered 'em? But they got drowned."

"Yes, I know. But that doesn't make it any easier for me, so far as this lunatic who writes the letters is concerned. Mrs. Hal has had one, too, and we both want to get to the bottom of the matter. Now, be a good chap, Ted, and come across with anything you know."

The landlord glanced towards the door.

"I don't know anything, Mr. Camber," he said. "The poor young boy, he go first. There was some talk about drink, but that didn't upset me or anybody that know me. Wherever that drink come from, it didn't come from this house."

"Who spread the story about the drink?"

"That appear to come from the people who pulled him out of the river. They gave evidence before the coroner."

"Know their names?"

"William and Benjamin Huckle."

"Not Camber men?"

"No. They come from Hill Rising, I think, or around there. That's a long way off. They wouldn't know anybody in Camber."

"How did they come to see the boy fall into the river?"

"They didn't see him fall in." This confirmed the report Hugh had had from Arthur. "When they pull him

out, he was gone.”

“What sort of men are they? I mean, why were they there, on the spot?”

“They were cutting reeds, I reckon. Their punt was pretty fairly loaded, it appear, and it take them some time to get to the boy. But I only know what I hear, and that’s what I was told. I didn’t go to the inquest. That’s held in licensing hours.”

“What about Mr. Paul Camber?”

“The boy’s death knock him right out. After the inquest that go up to Scotland and get drowned there.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about that. He was fishing for salmon and was alone at the time, I believe.”

“That appear to be the case.”

Just then two customers came in and all confidential talk was at an end. Hugh took his whisky to a wooden bench opposite the bar and lit a cigarette. As he sat there, he thought over the conversation, but there was little or nothing to be gained from it.

“In other words,” he said that evening to Jacob Salaman, whose sister had gone to a dance in Norwich, “somebody doesn’t like me and is out to make things uncomfortable. Well, he won’t get away with it. I’m going to find out who he is and scotch his little game. And I’d like to find out *why* he doesn’t like me. You read these letters and tell me what you think.”

“Are these all?”

“So far as I know, except for one which was sent to my younger brother’s widow.”

“It is all very interesting,” said Jacob. “I wonder whether you have noticed one very important thing?”

Hugh had a high respect for the Jewish intelligence.

“How do you mean?” he asked. Jacob smoked for almost two minutes without replying. Then he took the cigarette from his lips and waved it.

"There was none of this nonsense about anonymous letters until you began to interest yourself in Miss Catherine Tolley," he said. Hugh stared at him. "It is clear," continued Jacob, "that you have a rival. Find your rival, my dear Hugh, and you have your anonymous mud-slinger, I think. Yes, I really think so."

Hugh sat still, casting his mind back.

"Any ideas?" he asked.

"I know of no other lover. How should I? But it is not only other lovers who are rivals to a man who wishes to marry. There are jealous women who would themselves like to be married to you, perhaps. There are also brothers who do not wish to lose their sisters. That sort of thing."

"Yes, so there are. I must think things over. Anyway, whether you're right or wrong, you've cleared away a bit of the fog. I'd begun to wonder whether my cousin and his son really had been murdered. But if it's only some crazy person trying to make trouble because I'm going to marry Catherine, I shan't worry any more. The only thing is, I hope he won't continue to pester her. She's heard from him already, as I suppose you know."

"I did not know. She is very loyal, your Catherine. She would not gossip about such things. But what you say bears out my thought. It is your interest in her which is at the root of the matter."

"Well," said Hugh, "I'm obliged to you for the suggestion. You used the word 'brother,' didn't you?"

"Why," asked Jacob, meeting Hugh's eyes squarely, "do you not ask the advice of the Reverend Mr. Tolley?"

"Ask his advice?"

"Ask him what you should do about these accusations. So you shall not offend him, but, perhaps, flatter him a little. He is a man trained to solve problems, I suppose?"

"Well, he's the spiritual father of the parish, but he's a younger man, by far, than myself, and with less

experience of the world, I should say. Besides, I've already been to him once."

"That does not matter. He will like to be thought of as an adviser to an older man."

"What then? How will that help me?"

"I think that, from his demeanour, when you tell him about the letters, you may be able to gather whether he is their author."

Hugh was astounded by this.

"It seems a pretty long shot to me, Jacob," he said, to hide, he hoped, his astonishment. "Besides, when you come to think, he *can't* have written them. He's just about the last person I'd suspect."

"Why, please?"

"Well, Catherine herself got one. He wouldn't write that stuff to his sister. He's very fond of her, you know."

"If it had been the usual nasty type of anonymous letter, I agree that he would not write it. But these letters are not filthy. There is little sex, no pornography. They are nearly all about the deaths of Paul and Stephen. You see, I am sure he does not want his sister to marry you, so why should he not write to her, accusing you of murder? She may not believe it in her conscious thoughts, but underneath—who knows?—there may be that little, little doubt. I, who have had a different experience from yours—a more unhappy experience, Hugh—I think I know."

"You really think the letters might have that effect—to make Catherine doubt me?"

"Who can tell? There was a lot of talk in the village after the deaths of those two. A father and a son—or, rather, a son and a father—just like that, to be drowned, one after the other, it made for much talk, I can tell you."

Hugh went to bed that night feeling thoughtful and disconsolate. By morning he had made up his mind to accept at least part of Jacob's advice and, to this end, he walked down to the vicar's cottage, after a fairly late

breakfast, to find the Reverend Arthur at work, as usual, in his front garden.

"Look," said Hugh, without preamble, "I want to talk to you again about these abominable letters."

The vicar thrust his garden fork hard into a flower-bed and picked his coat out of a bush.

"I've had another one," he said. "Come on up to the house. I'd like to show it you. We must catch this fellow. He'll poison the whole parish if we don't take care."

"Envelope postmarked Colchester," said Hugh, when he saw the letter. It ran: *How can you let your sister marry such a monster God will see you get your reward call yourself a good man you ought to be in a labour camp.*

"What do you say to that? What ought I to do about it? I feel quite at a loss," said Arthur.

"Oh, dear!" said Hugh. "And I'd come for your advice. Anyway, if you can spare the time, I would like to talk the thing over. Where's Catherine?"

"Gone to visit old Mrs. Mowles. She won't be back for another hour at least."

"Has she seen this letter?—and may I add it to my collection?"

"Yes, of course, to both questions. Sit down, Hugh, and tell me what you think."

"Well, let's see what we know. The letters are all posted within easy motoring distance of this village, so that surely indicates somebody with a car."

"They're all posted from towns which are on the railway, so there's no particular reason to suppose that a car enters into it."

"First clue gone west," said Hugh cheerfully. "Let's try again. They are all posted south of Norwich. Does that get us anywhere?"

"The words are all cut from print. Does *that*?"

"Well, it would be the obvious thing to avoid putting pen to paper."

"Ah, but there are the envelopes. You have all but one, I believe. Surely we can do something with those."

"It seems as though we ought to be able to, but, apart from the fact that they're written in an unformed hand, they don't appear to tell us anything."

"What else can you suggest?"

"The next suggestion is not my own, but, the more I think it over, the more reasonable it appears."

"Yes?"

"That somebody doesn't want me to marry Catherine." He waited to see the effect of these words. The vicar's face did not disappoint him. It changed, and assumed an expression of horror.

"But they've all been with reference to the deaths of your cousin and his son!"

"Yes, but don't you see...?"

"I do see." Arthur's face resumed its normal expression. "Yes, there's certainly something in that. I must think it over. But who—besides myself!—and that was only at first, you know, my dear Hugh—*wouldn't* want Catherine to marry you? With me it was mere selfishness, I admit, but, in any case, it is Catherine's happiness that counts. I should never attempt to put any obstacles in *her* way, even"—he laughed in a natural, unforced manner—"even were I prepared to put some in yours!"

"I was hoping you might be able to suggest somebody besides yourself who might have some reasonable objection to the marriage. Is there, possibly, a rejected suitor in the offing?"

"Well, there are two, if not three, but I can't imagine..."

"Nobody ever can, in these sort of cases, I believe. It always seems to be somebody of apparently unimpeachable character who turns out to be the

anonymous menace. I think these unfortunate rejects could bear closer inspection. Who are they?"

"My dear chap, I do assure you, it could not be one of those fellows. It really could not! It would not be at all fair to give you their names."

"All right, then. What about getting my psychologist on to the job?"

"That might work."

"If you think so, why won't you give me the names of these men? She can't be expected to work in the dark."

"She?"

"Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley. I've worked with her before—in my Department, you know, when I was at the Ministry."

"Oh, I see." Arthur hesitated, but only for a second. "Isn't she rather expensive?"

"I don't know. I only know that she's internationally famous. Anyway, I've plenty of money."

"Look, Hugh, I realise that it's more your business than mine. But don't you think that, if we take no notice, the whole thing will die down?"

"It's an instinctive thought, by which observation I mean that I've nothing on earth to go on, but I don't believe it *will* die down. I feel there's something here that I've got to fight. I've got to get this nasty business settled, one way or another. The point is—are you with me or against me?"

"I don't know."

"Your own convenience *does* mean more to you than your sister's happiness?"

"No, no. But I certainly don't want my sister to marry while all these anonymous accusations are flying about. Murder's a horrible business."

There was a long pause. Hugh broke it.

"You know, Arthur, sometimes I think I'd give a lot to have my old life back again. In fact, if it weren't for

Catherine..."

"I'll now tell you what I think," said Arthur.

There was another long pause, as though Arthur hesitated to speak and as though Hugh, guessing what was coming, hesitated to hear him.

"Well?" he asked, at last. "What *do* you think, Arthur?"

"That the person most nearly concerned is your younger brother's widow, Mrs. Hal Camber."

"Her character isn't very attractive," Hugh admitted, "but I can't see her writing this anonymous rubbish. Where could she think it would get her?"

"Women," said Arthur, "always expect to get their own way and are apt to lack scruple."

"That's as may be. I still want to know the names of Catherine's rejected suitors. Won't you give them to me? I promise to be both circumspect and fair in my dealings with them. For their own sake we ought to wipe their names off the slate. Surely you agree about that?"

"That is not logical. They have no idea that you have written their names *on* the slate, as you call it. Not that you have—yet!"

"Look, Arthur, I'm going into the matter of this anonymous stink as closely as I can. You don't seem to realise that I don't much care to be called a dirty murderer."

"I can't help that, Hugh. I'm not prepared to name innocent men so that you can pursue them. I have met them both. Both are thoroughly decent, respectable chaps and I'm not going to be a party to having mud slung at them."

"My *dear* fellow! Whatever next? It is the anonymous letter-writer who is doing the mud-slinging, and I'm tired of being one of the targets, that's all."

"If you want those names you will have to ask Catherine for them, Hugh. I'll have no part in it. One thing

I can tell you, though; one name I can give you. If you want to pursue your enquiries in what might be a worthwhile direction, go and have a talk with Farmer Beresford."

"I've had a talk with him. His daughter ran into trouble with the man Verith, as we've mentioned, I think, before."

"What can you expect of a family that never attends church?"

"Not necessarily a lack of virtue. What do you suppose Beresford could tell me that I don't already know? The most likely thing he'd tell me, I should say, is to take my something face out of the light before he gives it a push to lend emphasis to his words. I should think the last thing a father would put up with is some nit-wit asking for details of a daughter's regrettable lapse."

He gave a nod and strode off at a pace rapid enough to cool his temper. Arthur, whether intentionally or not, made him both angry and impatient. He walked so far and so fast that it was not until he reached a five-barred gate which blocked the way to a farm-yard that he realised how his subconscious mind had tricked him. He was at the entrance to Beresford's farm.

An old man carrying a bucket of swill came up to the gate. Hugh, by virtue of his position and from the fact that he read the Lessons in church, was a public figure, so the ancient knew him by name.

"Good day, Mr. Camber. If you wanted Mr. Beresford, that's gone to Norwich. Missus be in and so be Miss Nessie."

"Oh, I'll come in, then, if I may."

The old man put down the bucket and opened the gate. Hugh walked past byres and a gobble of turkeys to the respectable Georgian front of the farmhouse. The door was closed. He clanged the bell. From inside the house a voice bade Nessie to see who that was, and a

young woman holding a baby came to the door. She stared at Hugh.

"Did you want anything?" she asked. Hugh remembered that the family did not go to church and thought, too, that the girl probably did not take her love-child into the village.

"My name is Hugh Camber," he said. "May I speak to you? I take it that you are Miss Beresford?"

The girl flushed deeply, but looked him straight in the eye.

"There's nothing I want from you...yet," was her surprising reply. Hugh gazed at her.

"I came upon business with your father," he said quietly, "but you and your mother could be just as much help, I daresay. I've already met your father, so..."

"You'd better come in," said the girl. "Shut the door, please, or we'll have the turkeys in as well."

She led the way into the first room which opened out of the hall, asked him to sit down, and then went to the door and called to somebody named Lizzie to come and take the baby.

"What is it, Nessie?" called out the voice which had told the girl to answer the door.

"Mr. Camber, the new Mr. Camber, come to see Dad, but he says we'll do as well. Will you see him?"

"Yes, when I change my apron."

The girl attempted no conversation. She seated herself opposite Hugh and gazed out of the window.

"Crops coming on all right?" asked Hugh, to break the silence.

"I suppose so."

"You do mixed farming here, I believe?"

"The only kind that pays nowadays." She was obviously so loth to talk that Hugh gave up all attempt to make her do so, and waited to make his next remark until Mrs. Beresford entered the room. She had the placid face

and far-seeing eyes of that countryside and she greeted Hugh with caution and unsmilingly.

"Good day, Mr. Camber. Was there anything you wish?"

"Well, yes, Mrs. Beresford. I am wondering whether you can help me." The woman stared at him, but not discourteously.

"That don't belong here, Mr. Camber," she said, with immense dignity. "We have no call to help anybody of your name."

"Look, Mrs. Beresford, I won't pretend I don't know what you mean, but, really, this is a different matter entirely. It's about some letters which have been sent to various people—anonymous letters."

"Oh? Well, nobody here write them."

"Of course not. But they're not very pleasant things to have, and I am by no means the only person concerned. I am trying to track down the writer and I wondered whether..."

"What do they say?"

"Generally speaking, that I murdered my cousin and his son in order to get the property for myself."

"That's silly talk."

"I know, but it's not very nice talk, either. You see, the woman I'm engaged to marry has had one, so has her brother, the vicar here, and so has a relative by marriage of my own. For these people's sakes, as much as for my own, I want these letters stopped."

"Then tell Mrs. Hal Camber to stop writing them," said Nessie.

"Nessie, that's too bad! You shouldn't bandy names like that!" cried the older woman.

"Only one name, Mother, and you know as well as I do why I say it. One of these days I'll have what's due to me, in spite of you and all the other Cambers," she added, turning her eyes full on Hugh again. Hugh picked

up his hat, apologised for taking up their time, and made for the door. “In *spite* of you—and I mean it both ways!” cried Nessie, flinging the words at his retreating back.

CHAPTER SIX

Enter Circe

"...and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain's a beard."

Shakespeare

"I wish," said Hugh to Catherine, over dinner at the country club of which he had become a member, "you'd do something for me. I may add that it's something Arthur has refused to do."

"How nice and truthful you are, Hugh. But if Arthur has refused to do it, whatever it is, I am not sure that I should be justified in obliging you. I must point out that we're not married yet."

"No, and if this anonymous serpent gets his way we never shall be. Do the letters make you think, in those depressing small-hours of the morning, as you lie tossing on your couch, that perhaps there's something *in* the insinuations that I murdered two fairly close relatives in order to get Camber for myself?"

"No. I don't lie awake in the small-hours, you see. I sleep soundly from eleven until seven. I am a woman whose sunny good-temper is marred only if she doesn't regularly get her eight hours."

Hugh smiled at the raillery, but looked serious again as he asked:

"Don't the letters bother you any more?"

"Well, they're a bore, of course, but I think of the poor wretch who writes them. She must be mentally afflicted."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. You and Arthur both seem to think the letters are written by a woman, but I have a different theory. I think they may come from a man."

"Unlikely, psychologically."

"Yes, I realise that, of course, but the man I'm thinking of may have a very special reason. Catherine, will you tell me about the men who may have proposed marriage to you and been turned down?"

"My poor Hugh!"

"It may be a laughing matter, but I'd rather like to *prove* that it is. I want to find this letter-writer and scotch him, and, to do that, I've got to eliminate all the people who might have a motive. Don't you see the force of that?"

"But, Hugh, dear, I can't have you going round to Bill Maitland and Raymond Tunstall and asking them whether they write anonymous letters! Of course they don't!"

"Has either of them married since you turned them down?"

"Well, no, but it was so recently that they asked me, they'd hardly have had time."

"Dangerous chaps, bachelors. I ought to know. Oh, well, let's enjoy the rest of our dinner in peace, and then I'll drive you out to look at the river by moonlight."

"We'd better not. It's ten o'clock already. I have my brother's reputation to think of. It would never do for the vicar's sister to come home at dawn. Besides, remember my eight hours!"

This was the last truly light-hearted conversation they indulged in for some time. Hugh drove Catherine home, refused Arthur's invitation to come in, and went straight back to Camber. Ethel brought his night-cap of whisky into the library and Hugh bade her good night and decided to read for an hour or so before he locked up the house.

As Camber was rambling and old, with sudden, awkward outcroppings of two or three stairs in the middle of corridors, dim and eerie little alcoves which appeared to be purposeless, and, on moonlight nights, ghostly

effects of shadows on mullioned windows, he was sufficiently old-fashioned to believe that going the rounds of such a house after nightfall was a task for a man, and that it was unfair to expect the women-servants *to* carry it out. He had no butler, as Jacob had declined this office.

The library was at one end of the long gallery which, as a matter of convenience, housed all the books which the room itself was not large enough to contain. One of Hugh's first pleasures in owning the house had been to carry out the task of putting what he termed the "readable" books into the library and to relegate to the glass-fronted shelves of the long gallery dozens of snuff-coloured volumes which it seemed incredible that anybody should have written, let alone expect anybody else to read.

He settled himself with the third volume of Parson Woodforde's diary in the edition of John Beresford, 1927, and prepared to spend a pleasantly relaxed hour before he went to bed. He helped himself to whisky and began to turn the pages.

"I was not quite so well as I could wish this Evening took a small dose of Rhubarb going to bed."

Hugh sipped his whisky and soda. It seemed to add relish to the "small dose of rhubarb."

"Reed a Note this Morning from Dr. Thorne informing me of the death of his Nephew Walker, and that he should be glad to have him buried at Weston on Thursday next."

There was a sudden loud creak of the library door. Hugh looked up sharply. The word "death," combined with the slightly startling sound, turned his thoughts again to Paul and Stephen. Paul would never walk...but what about the boy? A drowned child, crying for vengeance? A reedlike wraith come back to tell the tale of a death out of its proper time? "The small slain body, the flower-like face." Not an accurate picture of the thin, spidery, fifteen-

year-old Stephen of Hugh's imagining, perhaps, but it fitted Hugh's change of mood.

He replaced Parson Woodforde in the bookcase, gave him an affectionate pat, and walked over to the window. It was uncurtained and looked out on to a small informal garden at the side of the house. The night was so dark that he could not have said that he *saw* anything; all the same, he felt certain that *something* had darted away from such small portion of the garden as the light from the window illumined and that this *something* must now be in front of the terrace.

Hugh had had short experience of being a householder, but it had been long enough to persuade him that lurking figures which darted away from the light cast from uncurtained windows were little likely to be those of his friends and acquaintances. He left the library and rapidly descended the main staircase to the front door. This he locked and bolted. Then he stood for a few moments and listened, but there was nothing to be heard, so he made the rounds of the ground floor as rapidly as he could, shooting bolts and testing windows as he went, and then returned to the library by way of the long gallery which, he thought, seemed excessively dark; the lamp probably had a failing bulb, for the house was electrically lighted. He groped his way past shelves upon shelves of books and spared no glance for the windows in the opposite wall. Upon regaining the library he felt a sense of self-congratulation which, when he thought it over, seemed strange. However, he had had a feeling that danger lurked near by, and there was no doubt that it would have been easy to take him by surprise in the gallery.

As it was, he poured out another tot, took down Parson Woodforde again, and was reading: "Killed another fat Pigg this Morning and the weight was 9 stone and half," when he was roused by a scream on a female upper

register not unlike, he thought, the scream of the said fat pig at its killing.

“Ee! Ee! Ee!” went the scream. Hugh put down Parson Woodforde and went to the door. The one dim light burned mid-way along the gallery. With the open door behind him, Hugh listened. Nothing stirred. Concluding that one of the women servants had been having nightmare, he stepped back into the room and, to prove to himself the soundness of his nerves, switched off the light and walked along the gallery to his bedroom at the opposite end. When he was less than half-way, the light in the gallery went out. Another presence in the gallery was indicated. Hugh began to advance, intent only upon doing so without a sound. He was thinking of the best way of tackling the intruder, when he tripped over the head of a defunct, magnificent tiger, the skin of which had been made into a rug. At the same instant there was a scurry of feet along the gallery and the scream was repeated at such close quarters that Hugh who, although he had struck his head in falling, still had his senses unimpaired, thought he detected the war-cry of the excitable and volatile Hildegarde.

He was right. With an electric torch in one hand and a formidable iron poker in the other, she had come tearing along the gallery, screeching like a banshee, and, as she was waving the torch wildly in the air, not unnaturally she tripped over Hugh and the tiger’s head.

“Assassin, I have you!” she cried, as she fell.

“Don’t be an ass,” said Hugh, testily. He scrambled to his feet and hauled her up. “Now, what is it?”

“He had a knife! I saw it flash!” cried Hildegarde excitedly. “He is by way of the main stairs!”

Hugh snatched the poker from her and ran, flicking on the light at the top of the main staircase as he went, but at the far end of the gallery he halted. The staircase divided, half-way down. One flight led to the large

drawing-room and what had been intended as a boudoir, the other led to the principal dining-room and an ante-chamber.

Hugh stood still at this parting of the ways and listened, but there was no sound to guide him. In the end, he descended to the front door, to find that this was still locked and bolted as he had left it. Switching on lights everywhere as he went, and still having the unpleasant feeling that the house held too many nooks in which a would-be assassin or burglar could lurk with intent, he continued his round of the ground-floor doors and windows, trying each one as he came to it. It seemed absurd, this second pilgrimage, and yet, much more than the first, a spine-chilling business. Hugh, who had been trained to dislike taking chances, felt that he might be taking one every second.

He went, somewhat fearfully, up the back stairs, to find that Hildegarde had switched on the gallery light again and was standing beside the tiger-rug with a halberd, taken from the wall, in her hand. She made a striking, Boudiccan figure. Her hair was unbound, her striding stance was martial, and she flourished her extinguished torch at Hugh. She was fully dressed.

"I wait for my poker, which you snatch," she said. "It belongs to the room where I am."

Hugh handed it over in exchange for the halberd. This he replaced on the wall between two of the windows.

"Did you see who it was?" he asked. Hildegarde shook her head.

"A man climbs in at my window and I scream because I am virtuous," she explained. "Also because I think perhaps I am to be murdered in my bed, and that is a not nice place to be murdered. But the man does not wish to murder me or do anything else to me. He wishes but to run through my room with a knife in his hand."

"How do you know about the knife?"

"I did not then know about the knife, but I saw something shine when I switched on my torch and followed him."

"It was pretty plucky of you, I must say."

"You see, I think to myself that he is a burglar and I like a burglar even less than I like a murderer. The life, it is not so important, but the money—that is another matter."

"Well, I'd better see you back to your room," said Hugh.

They traversed the gallery to the front staircase, descended half-way, crossed the dining-room and its ante-room, and made their way to the wing in which Hildegarde and her brother had made their home. They ascended a staircase, traversed a corridor, and went as far as a room where the electric light was still showing.

"There!" said Hildegarde, pointing triumphantly to the open window, which could be seen from the open doorway. "And the fire-escape! Easy for him, do you see?"

"I should have thought you'd have preferred a room which did not have the fire-escape leading up to it," said Hugh, resisting her efforts to impel him over the threshold.

"Oh, but I am a pyrophobe. Always I like to know that, in case of fire, I have simply to open the window. I will close it now." She did so. "And fasten it." She pushed home the catch. "Better to suffocate a little than to have strange men with knives rushing about all night."

"He got out the same way, I've no doubt," said Hugh. "Well, thank you again—and good night."

It was with no enthusiasm for the walk that he made his way back to the library. He had no intention of going to bed immediately. He locked the door, tried the window-fastenings, and then altered the position of an armchair so that, from it, he could command a view of both door and window. Then he poured himself a stiffish whisky,

added a modicum of soda, and picked up his book. When a faint greyish light began to manifest itself through the closely-drawn curtains, he put down his book and went to bed.

Three days later, having taken every precaution during the intervening evenings and nights to secure the house against intrusion, he invited the local doctor and his wife to dinner. He had played golf with the doctor once or twice and had been to dinner at his house. He invited the Bembridges, too, and the party also included, as Hugh's own dinner-partner, a sprightly old lady with sharp black eyes, a beaky little mouth, claw-like hands alive with diamonds, an eldritch cackle, and a bizarre taste in evening clothes. She was introduced to the company by Hugh as "Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley, who helped us out at the Ministry once when we were in the very devil of a spot."

"Yes," agreed Dame Beatrice, with a leer which startled Jacob, the recipient of it, so much that he choked on some sherry which went the wrong way, "Mr. Camber and I are old acquaintances. Nevertheless, I supposed that he had forgotten me, and I must confess that I was both surprised and flattered by his invitation to visit him here at Camber Abbey."

Hugh laughed, and added that he had had an ulterior motive in asking her to pay him a visit. She cackled and said that she had suspected something of the sort. He volunteered no further explanation at the time, and the other guests were far too polite to ask questions. Their curiosity, if they had any, was satisfied when dinner was over, the coffee cups cleared away, and the party gathered in the larger of the drawing-rooms.

At the first pause in the general conversation, Hugh addressed a question point-blank to Bembridge.

"What do you know of a man named Maitland and another called Tunstall?"

"Bill Maitland? Raymond Tunstall?"

"Those are the chaps I mean."

"Bill Maitland farms somewhere over Biltham way. He isn't one of your tenants."

"I'm glad to hear that. What about Tunstall?"

"Lets out cruisers and yachts to visitors. A very warm man, I believe. Lives in a bungalow over Horning way somewhere."

"A catch for any woman, as the Victorians might have put it?"

"Decidedly, I should say."

"How old is he?"

"Thirty-six or seven."

"Good-looking? Attractive?"

"Not particularly either, so far as I'm concerned, but if you mean that he might be attractive to women, I don't think any man could say. I often wonder what makes women fall for the men they marry."

"They don't, Charles dear. They take what they can get," said Marion Bembridge.

"And are thankful to get it," retorted her husband.

"Why this interest in two characters you don't seem to know?" asked the doctor.

"They have something in common with me. They proposed to Catherine Tolley."

"And you want to check your fatal fascination against their unfatal ditto?" asked the doctor's wife. "Well, I can tell you one thing."

"No tales out of school, Margaret," said the doctor, on a note of warning.

"I shall tell this one. Tunstall is said to be a devotee of the bottle. That alone would account for Catherine's turning him down, I should think."

"Oh, come! He likes a drink, but don't we all?" said Bembridge.

“Why do men always and invariably support one another against women’s insinuations?” demanded Marion. Nobody appeared to notice that Dame Beatrice had taken no part in the conversation. It now became general and lively, however, and she soon joined in. Some time later she said:

“Mr. Camber is going to tell you why he has invited me here.”

Hugh looked at her in horror.

“I thought,” he began.

“You thought it was to be a deep, dark secret?”

“Well, forewarned is forearmed, you know. I didn’t think the real purpose of your visit ought to be allowed to leak out—at any rate, not yet.”

Dame Beatrice gazed, like a benevolent snake, at the faces around her.

“Nobody here is going to breathe a word, naturally,” said Marion, in a tone of gentle rebuke.

“No, no, of course not,” said Hugh. The rest of the company sat very still. Dame Beatrice felt that, if such a course had been physically possible, their ears would be quivering. The doctor’s wife spoke first.

“Alaric is accustomed to the Confessional,” she said lightly. “We may answer for his discretion. As for me, I must be my own guarantee, I’m afraid.”

“Well,” said Marion, with spirit, “I’m sure the agent of the Camber estates is not likely to yak about anything Hugh wants kept dark.”

“Bless you,” said Dame Beatrice, “if I am to succeed in the task to which Mr. Camber has called me, the more yak—if I understand the onomatopæic—the better. I will tell you now why I am here. I am to discover the writer of anonymous letters who accuses Mr. Camber of murdering Mr. Paul Camber and his son Stephen.” Into the shocked silence which followed this bland explanation she tossed one other remark. “Of course, if the anonymous letter-

writer is correct, and Mr. Hugh Camber *did* commit the murders, there must have been an accomplice, one would say. Now, Mr. Camber?"

"There certainly would have been an accomplice," said Hugh grimly. "I can prove where I was and what I was doing, I should hope, when..." He stopped short. "No, not when Paul died," he added suddenly.

"Ah," said Dame Beatrice. "Now that will be enough ammunition for the yakkers, if there are any present—and I do hope that, if there are not, somebody will be sufficiently helpful..."

"I'll do anything to help Hugh and Catherine," declared Marion eagerly. "Oh, dear, we must go! It's after eleven. Come along, darling. Yes, you can have one more whisky, since I see Hugh making masculine sort of gestures towards the decanter. Margaret and I will take time to powder our noses. It is lovely for you to get free whisky. We mustn't deprive you of it."

"There's just one rather interesting thing that I think Dame Beatrice ought to know. Hugh won't know about this unless one of the other servants has told him. Anybody mentioned the medical history of Ethel, Hugh?" asked the doctor, when his wife and Mrs. Bembridge had retired.

"No. Should I have been interested?"

"Probably not, but Dame Beatrice will be. Ethel is a picker and stealer."

"What?" Hugh sat up straight. "*Ethel!* But she's a most respectable girl! A churchgoer, a Sunday School teacher, a reader of Bibles, and a pillar of the Village Institute. Spends her free half-day in good works."

"This wasn't very serious—except for Ethel. She stole and ate some tomatoes which she 'lifted' out of a glass dish on the dining-room sideboard."

"I shouldn't consider that much of a peccadillo. Is that all she took?"

“Indeed, yes. But the actual taking was less important than its effects. I was called in to stem the results of her lapse from grace.”

“Poisoning?” said Dame Beatrice. “Atropine?”

“Atropine, yes. But wasn’t it an extraordinary thing? I mean, one knows, I suppose, that the tomato, the potato, and the deadly nightshade belong to the same natural order, but who ever heard of a lethal tomato?”

Dame Beatrice produced a small notebook and inscribed some almost illegible hieroglyphics. She showed them to the doctor. He looked at her neat, medico-legal calligraphy, deciphered it without difficulty, and whistled.

“Could be,” he said; and raised his eyebrows at her. “But it must have been deliberately done and yet it wouldn’t have killed Ethel even if I hadn’t treated her. She was vomiting pretty badly and there didn’t seem much doubt that the tomatoes were the cause.”

“You didn’t think of getting the tomatoes analysed?”

“No, I didn’t, for the simple reason that I took her symptoms at the time for hysteria. In any case, some very strong, sweet tea soon put her right and we got her to bed. Later on, I thought it over, but, again, I couldn’t see how the tomatoes could have poisoned her unless it was a very idiosyncratic allergy, so I let it go. It still puzzled me, however, so I asked whether any of the tomatoes were left, but they had all been disposed of.”

“Were there any symptoms apart from the vomiting?”

“Yes. She appeared to be merrily tight, laughing, shouting, and staggering about. But for the evidence of the cook, the housekeeper, and the kitchen-maid, I should have taken it for granted that she *was* drunk, but their combined assurances that she ‘never touched a drop’ and that the only alcohol in the house was in the wine-cellar, the key of which never left Paul Camber’s possession, convinced me that it was a curious allergy to tomatoes and that was all.”

"You said she was laughing, shouting, and staggering about, and appeared to be drunk," said Hugh. "But, surely, exactly the same thing was said of young Stephen Camber just before he was drowned?"

"Was it? I was away from home, doing a locum when he was drowned. Was that really said about him?"

"Why, yes, I remember it distinctly. It was the housekeeper here who told me about it when she gave notice. She seemed to think it was a scandalous thing to say about the boy. She also said there was no way in which Stephen could have imbibed anything alcoholic. And, of course, he wasn't poisoned; he was drowned. I mean—"

"Poisoned and drowned, it would appear," said Dame Beatrice. "By the way, when did Ethel suffer from eating the tomatoes?—before or after the deaths of Stephen and Paul Camber?"

"Very shortly before Paul's death. Stephen, of course, died a short while before his father."

"I see." She changed the subject, as Marion and the doctor's wife came in, to that of Paul's fateful holiday in Scotland. From that the conversation turned, more cheerfully, to deer-stalking in the Highlands, to salmon-fishing in the Irish loughs, to shikari in India, but before the guests departed Dame Beatrice referred again to the mysterious behaviour of Ethel.

"What happened exactly?" she asked.

"Oh, we'd just gone to bed when Paul Camber's cook knocked us up," said the doctor's wife. "She seemed in a bit of a flap, so Alaric went along."

"I asked whether Paul Camber knew that Ethel was ill," said the doctor, "but when I saw the girl I realised why they hadn't reported to him. Ethel gave the impression that she was hopelessly drunk. I asked how on earth she had come to get into such a state, but the other servants swore she had taken nothing, as I told you."

“‘If she hasn’t had alcohol,’ I said, ‘what *has* she had?’ The other maid said it was a judgement on her. There must have been something wrong with the dining-room tomatoes. Ethel, it appeared, was so fond of tomatoes that she had pinched three off the dining-room sideboard, yielding to a temptation which, according to cook, had stung her like an adder.”

“How long before you saw her had she eaten these tomatoes?” asked Dame Beatrice.

“A matter of nearly three hours. Had them with her supper at eight o’clock that night. Cook had given her a drink of water after she’d been sick, and she didn’t seem able to swallow, so I ordered some strong tea with lots of sugar, and that was that.”

“And you did not tell Paul Camber about this?”

“No, I didn’t. The girl was soon all right again. When I first saw her, as I said, she seemed tight, but a little later on her face was encarmined and her breathing became very slow. The strong tea was brought and she was persuaded to drink it. She seemed depressed and stupid, but by the time I left the house she was sleeping peacefully, with her respiration restored to normal.”

“*Solanaceae* is a fairly wide-spread natural order,” said Dame Beatrice.

“Oh, yes, it was atropine poisoning, as we said. Odd that young Stephen must have suffered from the same allergy. Of course, Paul was not a particularly moral character. I suppose Ethel couldn’t be Stephen’s mother?” suggested the doctor. No one seemed to think that this was likely, although Marion Bembridge declared that she wouldn’t put much past Paul Camber, and how he had dared to read the Lessons in church on Sunday mornings she could not think. The party then broke up.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fancies, Facts, and Theories

“Downhill I came, hungry and yet not starved.”

Edward Thomas

When the guests had gone, Dame Beatrice settled herself in a deep armchair by the wood fire and said:

“From your letter to me, I gather that you are inclined to believe your anonymous correspondent.”

“Believe him? Oh, about the manner of the deaths of my cousin and his son! I don’t know how you guessed, but I’ve certainly begun to wonder whether their deaths were accidental, and it’s an additional reason for my wanting to identify the letter-writer. I want to find out whether it’s guesswork on his part or whether he knows something that ought to go to the police. Anyway, I shall be interested to hear how you propose to set about finding out who he is. Have you any cut-and-dried plan? I had not much opportunity to follow your methods when you helped us at the Ministry last year, but I’m afraid I don’t see how village gossip inspired by Mrs. Bembridge and Mrs. Castleton is going to help us. I should have thought it would simply drive the chap underground for a bit, only to have him break out again later on.”

“If the letter-writer lived in the village, it might well have that result.”

“Well, then...?”

“I do not think the letter-writer does live in the village, Mr. Camber. If he does not, the gossip will have no effect on him, the letters will continue, and we can tackle the rejected suitors, as you wish to do.”

“I don’t see *how* they are to be tackled, I must confess. If they’re innocent, won’t our proceedings be

actionable?"

"We shall not begin by contacting them personally. We shall find out to what extent, if any, they are given to leaving their homes and making excursions, either by rail or by car."

"Of course—for the purpose of posting the letters! Exactly so. I say, though, all the same, won't it soon get round to them, if we begin questioning station-masters and ticket-collectors and garage hands about these fellows' movements?"

"Leave it to me, Mr. Camber. So long as you do not appear in the matter, all will be plain sailing." She paused and Hugh waited, realising that she had more to say. She said it with a gentleness which she realised was not absolutely necessary, for Hugh had not troubled to disguise his feelings with regard to his brother's widow. "You do realise, Mr. Camber, don't you, that we shall be wasting our time by tracing the movements of these two men? I am convinced that we need look no further than your own family for the writer of the letters."

"Héloïse Camber, you mean? I can see why you think that. My young friend Salaman would agree with you, but I'm afraid I don't. Héloïse doesn't like me very much, it's true, but I don't see her stooping to anonymous letter-writing. Besides, there are the envelopes to consider. Héloïse may not be over-educated, but she could scarcely manage an unformed fist like that."

"How old did you say her son was?"

"Peter's eleven, I believe." Hugh stared at his interlocutor. "Oh, but she wouldn't drag *him* in! She's genuinely passionately fond of the boy. There's no possible doubt about that."

"Have you ever seen a specimen of the child's handwriting?"

"No. I used to see to it that he wrote to Héloïse while he was here and she was in hospital, but I had enough of

having my own letters censored at school to wish to pry into the kid's correspondence. He used to post them himself, too. Yes, I can see your point of view but—well, I suppose I don't *want* to believe you. I couldn't possibly tackle Héloïse on such a subject. If you are right, the best thing would be for me to marry Catherine as soon as possible. That should put an end to all this nonsense."

"Have you considered that it might also put an end to *you*?"

Hugh, who had been carefully cutting the end off a cigar, jerked up his head.

"You're not serious!"

Dame Beatrice studied him; then she said:

"I am perfectly serious, Mr. Camber. And I have the feeling that you have good reason to agree with me."

"Look," said Hugh, "you may or may not be right about the author of the letters. I'm prepared to keep an open mind there. But I simply do not and will not believe that a tiresome little woman—which is all that Héloïse amounts to—could have murdered a man and a fifteen-year-old boy and is prepared, if I marry, to murder *me*. You see, it was undoubtedly a man—" He paused.

"Yes, Mr. Camber?"

"Well, I've a feeling that I *am* in somebody's way. The somebody *ought* to be Héloïse, but, if it is, then she's managed to get hold of a male stooge."

"Tell me the whole story, Mr. Camber. I had no idea that it was already so intriguing."

"Well, I got you down here under false pretences, I'm afraid. My excuse is that, while the anonymous letters are facts which can be proved, a possibly murderous attempt on my life is neither absolute fact nor capable of proof. In other words, nothing much happened and not a hair of my head was injured. I did sustain a jolt to the solar plexus, but that was accidental."

He recounted the incidents of the night in question economically and sufficiently. Dame Beatrice listened with grave attention until he had finished. Then she said:

"I should like to inspect the long gallery and then to speak to Miss Salaman."

"They won't have gone to bed yet. They'll be drinking brown sherry and talking. They talk incessantly. I'll go and ask her to talk to you."

"I will accompany you if we may go by way of the gallery. There is nothing I like better than to roam about old houses at night."

They mounted the main staircase together.

"This is where I tripped up and Hildegarde fell on me," said Hugh, pausing midway along the gallery.

"I do not see the tiger-skin rug."

"I've had it moved. I didn't fancy the idea of its tripping up one of the servants."

They passed on and reached the top of the back staircase.

"Miss Salaman came by this staircase into the long gallery, then?" said Dame Beatrice. "It scarcely seems the quickest way to the west wing."

"Oh, well, there's a corridor leads off at the bend of the stairs. You will see."

He led the way. It certainly was a rambling old mansion, Dame Beatrice thought, and offered endless possibilities for lawlessness if such were contemplated. They arrived at Hildegarde's door and knocked, but there was no response, so Hugh went further along the passage and knocked again.

Jacob opened the door. The apartment within was low-ceilinged, heavily panelled, and contained an assortment of worn but comfortable armchairs, a table, and a litter of books and periodicals.

"Please to come in," said Jacob. "Hildegarde, we have visitors."

Hildegarde produced two more wine-glasses and filled them. Hugh and Dame Beatrice were given the two most comfortable, or least decrepit, chairs, and an atmosphere of relaxation was achieved with the minimum of exertion by the hosts. These were naturally hospitable, in the sense that they expected people to take them as they found them, and would have been in no wise put about by the invasion of a dozen unexpected callers, provided that the sherry and the wine-glasses would go round.

"And now?" said Hildegarde, when the usual banalities had been exchanged. Hugh glanced at Dame Beatrice and raised his eyebrows as an indication that the trend of conversation depended upon her.

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said Dame Beatrice, accepting a role which she had marked, in any case, as her own. "Miss Salaman, Mr. Salaman, I am here upon an errand different from that which I had supposed was mine. It appears that I am here to advise Mr. Camber how best he may preserve so much of life as may yet be apportioned him. I wonder, Miss Salaman, whether I may trouble you for your account of what happened here three nights ago?"

"But nothing happened, and please to call me Hildegarde. Hugh fell over the tiger and the man escaped and I fell on Hugh and I screamed very much and the man ran away down my fire-escape. That is all."

"May I, in the morning, see the window by which, I understand, the intruder climbed in?"

"But certainly. Never do I open it again! He will not come that way a second time! Imagine the impudence! To come and then to go—a man!—*by way of my bedroom!* It is disgraceful!"

"It must have been someone who knew the house pretty well," said Hugh. "He not only knew the easiest way to get into the house, but, according to Hildegarde,

the way from this wing to the long gallery. That means he knew where my room was, too."

"Ah, yes," said Dame Beatrice. "Has this house ever been thrown open to the public, do you know?"

"I'm sure it hasn't," said Hugh. "Paul was a wealthy man who had no need for the half-crowns of motor-coach parties, and he was far too reserved, not to say selfish, to have opened his house to sightseers, no matter how respectable and even eminent they might be."

"The man was a common burglar," declared Jacob. "He was not dangerous at all, except to money and silver and jewels."

"He had a knife. I saw it glint," protested Hildegarde.

"Yes, a knife to slip under window-catches or prise open a drawer, perhaps. He was an amateur, I would say. A common sneak-thief. Not even a safe-blower or a proper cracksman," retorted her brother.

"Nobody is so amateur to think a knife will break open a house like this," said Hildegarde crossly. "He came to murder Hugh, as the letters said."

"Do not talk foolishness! Nothing in the letters said anyone should murder Hugh. You are an ignorant sensationalist. Why should Hugh be murdered?"

"Because, when Hugh is dead, the money will go to somebody else, of course. It is you who cannot reason!" screamed Hildegarde.

Hugh thought it well to intervene before the protagonists, who were now shouting and gesticulating, should become more heated.

"I'm prepared to keep an open mind, of course," he said, "but I can't see what there is here to tempt a burglar, Jacob. There's only a certain amount of silver, no jewellery, and even the family portraits have no value except to the family themselves."

"The burglar may not have known that," argued Jacob.

“Yes, he would! You did not listen to what was said! The burglar, as you call him, must have known the house. If he knew the house, he knew what is in the house,” declared Hildegarde passionately.

“Well, we can leave it at that for the present,” said Hugh. “Is there anything else you want to know from Hildegarde, Dame Beatrice?”

“Not at the moment.”

“In that case...?”

They bade the brother and sister good night and went back to the long gallery. The principal guest-room was at the far end of it, next door but one to the library. Hugh accompanied Dame Beatrice to the library door and, before bidding her good night, he said abruptly:

“If you can prove that Héloïse wrote those letters, I think we can scare her into admitting it. I don’t think she’s a very tough type. It needs to be remembered, however, that she’d do anything—and that, I think, means literally *anything*—to obtain this place for the boy.”

Dame Beatrice nodded, and bade him good night. She watched him walk along the gallery, but no intruder sprang out on him. She stood there until he switched off the gallery light and went into his room. Even then, she waited a little longer, listening intently. Everything was silent.

She retired to her room but did not go to bed immediately. She stood at the window and gazed out into the darkness, thinking over all she had heard that evening. She summed up Hildegarde Salaman as reliable up to a point, but prone, possibly, to exaggeration, and, under duress, to lying. There was no proof that any intruder had intended a murderous attack on Hugh Camber. It would be interesting to know what he *had* intended, although she thought she could guess. Still, all this, she felt, had only a secondary interest compared

with the mysterious drownings of Stephen Camber and his father.

Mysterious, she felt, they most certainly were. The picture of a staggering, shouting, idiotically laughing boy was a dreadful one, especially once she had obtained the vital clue to his condition. Atropine, not alcohol, was the answer. It had never been diagnosed because the actual cause of death was drowning and nobody—certainly not the coroner, who was dependent upon the medical evidence—had suspected that the drowning might have had a predisposing feature.

The death of Paul, also by drowning, presented no very clear picture. To begin with, Dame Beatrice, who had a complete visual image of the delicate boy, could form no mental portrait of his father. Then, apart from the fact that it had occurred in Scotland and on a fishing holiday, she had no picture, either, of the scene of Paul's death. Loch, salmon-river, trout-stream, even the open sea, were all possible locations.

The simplest explanation of Paul's death was that it had been suicide, brought about by overwhelming grief for the death of his son, but she doubted whether an intending suicide would have been likely to go on a fishing trip to Scotland in order to commit an act which, much more conveniently and much less expensively, could have been carried out in Norfolk. If the death had to be made to look like an accident, an overturned yacht on the Broads or on one of the many rivers, or a bathing fatality off a treacherous part of the coast were obvious alternatives.

A second theory was tenable: that Paul, for some unknown reason, had killed his son and that someone who knew of the crime had killed Paul. The tutor, Verith, had been fond of the boy and had good reason to detest the father, who had dismissed him with ignominy from his post for a reason which the tutor had claimed was not

valid. It remained to be determined what manner of man Verith was, and whether there were any grounds for supposing that he had been in the vicinity (wherever that proved to be) at the time of Paul's death.

There remained a third possibility—the culpability of the angry farmer, Beresford, father of a misguided daughter; grandfather of a bastard. Beresford might have had motive enough to have encompassed both deaths. He might have punished Paul by killing Stephen and then he might have decided to kill Paul, too. This theory was unobjectionable, technically speaking, but for one thing: it postulated that Paul, and not Verith, was the father of the Beresford baby. Still, even that, according to Hugh, had been broadly hinted, and Marion Bembridge would certainly have gone bail for it.

Any attempt to prove or to disprove any of these theories must begin, Dame Beatrice decided, with an investigation into the death of the boy. Upon this thought, she went to bed and slept lightly but sufficiently until seven in the morning.

By a quarter to eight she was out in the drive. She made her way to the village inn to find her chauffeur and make arrangements for a short but, she hoped, productive tour in her car. She found George giving it a final polish after cleaning it.

“Good morning, George.”

“Good morning, madam. May I ask when you require to go out in her?”

“When I've had breakfast, I suppose. Fancy your having the car out and ready! You might be a mind-reader, George!”

“I thought you'd be bound to take a trip round the neighbourhood soon, madam, to get the lie of the land, and I informed them here accordingly. Please to come on in, madam. There are eggs and rashers cooking.”

"The eggs and rashers are for you, George, not for me."

"This is not what I would call a close-fisted house, madam. Please to come in. A double supply can be rustled up immediately, or so I am informed by the young woman who helps with the cooking."

Dame Beatrice enjoyed her early breakfast. She enjoyed, too, an informal chat with the girl who served it.

"We have no excitement down here, madam? Oh, but we do! If you had been in Camber village when the news come of Mr. Paul and poor young Master Stephen, you think there was excitement enough. Of course, there was talk about Mrs. Hal Camber, but nawthen could be done about that."

"Why should they talk about her?"

"That try hard enough to be mistress up at the Abbey. Everybody know that. That's common talk around here."

"I'm staying at the Abbey. The new Mr. Camber is a friend of mine. He has said nothing about Mrs. Hal becoming mistress of the Hall. Why should she?"

"On account of Master Peter being the heir, now poor Master Stephen go, poor little boy. Some say she had a hand in matters, but I can't believe that. That would be too wicked altogether."

"So, George, suspicion has been cast upon Mrs. Hal Camber with regard to the deaths of her cousin-by-marriage and his son," said Dame Beatrice, when they were once more in the inn yard.

"I think it's only idle talk, madam. I've heard similar opinions expressed, but suspicion is too strong a word, in my view, according to what I've gathered."

"Mrs. Hal Camber certainly is not beloved in the village, George."

"True enough, madam. Where would you wish to be driven?"

"Is the village of Hill Rising on your map?"

They reached Hill Rising by way of one of the secondary roads which led to Yarmouth. They turned off it after a dozen miles or so and followed the course of the river until the road did indeed begin to rise as it left the water. Broad acres stretched on either side of the road, and the young wheat was already showing. A church tower stood among trees. On the water-meadows, towards which the road was wending, a windmill stood dark and stark, without sails, against the pallor of the early-morning sky.

Abruptly the road swung to the right and rose to a hump-backed bridge, and another mile and a half brought the explorers to a village, a small place centred round a very large church, two public houses, and a post-office. The main thoroughfare turned sharply between the second public-house and the post-office, but George took a right-hand turn alongside the church and drew up in a broad and tree-lined road.

"I can park here, madam," he said, "while I make enquiries. Can you tell me any name I can ask for?"

"Huckle—there are two of them, I believe."

He returned at the end of twenty minutes to report that the brothers Huckle were at breakfast and would be at her disposal, in about a quarter of an hour, down by the camping site.

"It seems a pity to spoil a village like this with a camping site, George, does it not? Caravans, I presume."

The camping site, however, was a long, quiet mooring for yachts and cruisers and, at that time of year, was almost deserted. There were two or three boats of fair size, however, and these appeared to be still in commission.

"Floating homes, no doubt, madam," said George, when she pointed this out. "I dare say they've been in occupation all winter."

“Not the ideal winter quarters, George, one would venture to think, and, in any case, somewhat cramped.”

The car had been run on to a narrow rectangle of grass which bordered a short path alongside the water, and it was not long before a motor-cyclist with a pillion passenger pulled up beside it. George identified the newcomers.

“Mr. Huckle and his brother, madam.”

“I am making a report on the accident to Stephen Camber,” stated Dame Beatrice.

“If you care to follow in your car, we can take you to the spot where the youngster fall in the water,” said the pillion passenger, a man of slow speech but ready intelligence. “Drive on, bor Harry.”

The road, of little importance, soon degenerated into a broad, muddy cattle drive. The woods, which, at first, had screened the water from view, gave place to open rough pasture. About a mile and a half of this, and a decrepit wooden bridge took the cattle drive across a wide ditch. In the immediate foreground appeared a huddle of willows. When both vehicles had crossed the bridge, the motor-cyclist signalled a halt, and George pulled up and got out.

“Beyond the trees, that’s where he tumble in. That’s why we didn’t see it happen. The road twist and the trees act like a wall.”

Dame Beatrice joined them on the muddy track, and all four walked forward and rounded the bend by the trees.

“Now,” she said, “it is very important that you tell me all you can about what happened. The question of an inheritance may depend upon it.”

“Ah, Camber Abbey you mean. That do seem a long way from here, but we read the papers. The poor youngster, that should have had the place when his father die, but...”

"But the boy died first. What can you tell me of the manner of his death?"

"Nothing much but what everybody hear already. That got to be common talk in our village; in Camber village, too, I reckon."

"Where did you first see the boy?"

"A hundred yards or so further back. Clearing the dyke we were. That's pretty slow work, but a man clearing weeds have no time much to look about him. Still, we notice him."

"What made you notice the boy particularly?"

"That shout and babble."

"That seem excited, like," added the younger Huckle.
"That laugh."

"Then that seem to stagger about, like an old boozier," explained the older brother. "But we think it was just an old game that play by himself."

"Can you think of anyone who might be able to add anything to what you have told me?"

"Nobody but old Tom Teek. Tom, that make up the road and have time to knock off now and then and look at the boy."

"Didn't it occur to you that the boy was acting rather dangerously and foolishly?"

"That were no business of ours. That was for his father to guide him more sensible. We don't interfere."

"Well, I think I had better talk to Mr. Teek. You might direct me to where I can find him."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Siren

“There might you hear her kindle her soft voice
In the close murmur of a sparkling noise,
And lay the ground-work of her hopeful song.”

Richard Crashaw

Tom Teek had a small thatched cottage at Cadham. He was not at home when Dame Beatrice called, and his wife directed her to where he most probably would be found at work.

“That expect to be sent to make up the drove road Axter way. You can’t miss it if you keep your eyes open. That take his old dinner and reckon to get a glass of beer at the ‘Rod and Line,’ so I know that don’t expect to be home till tea-time.” She pointed out the direction the car was to take and went indoors.

The narrow road wound in the manner that gave point to the old saying that the original Norfolk roadmakers always worked with their backs to the wind. It was bordered by giant elms which had finished their flowering and were beginning to come into tiny, incredible leaf. A hump-backed bridge carried the road over a river. There were cattle grazing in meadows and, far-off, the lines of willows indicated more streams. Just past the windmill which had been given as a landmark was the drove road.

The old man had come by bicycle and they found him seated beside his machine eating cold dumplings and a piece of cheese. George stopped the car and got out.

“Mr. Teek, sir?”

“Surely, sir.”

“Dame Beatrice would like a word.”

Dame Beatrice found herself confronting a healthy-looking, blue-eyed old man who received her with a polite nod of the head.

"Good morning, Mr. Teek. I was recommended to you by Mr. Huckle."

"Which one of them?—bor Harry or bor Billy?"

"By both of them. Mr. Teek, they told me, is the man to give me the information I want."

"Ah, I shouldn't wonder. Not much I don't know about what go on around these parts."

"This went on some months ago; last summer, I understand. A boy was drowned near where you were working. The brothers Huckle were cleaning a dyke near by and saw the boy and, I think, pulled the body out, but don't seem to know much about what happened."

"I remember it all very clear. I was called by the Crowner. That tell me I give my evidence very well."

"I'm sure you did. You said, no doubt, that the boy was behaving very strangely."

"That sing and holler."

"Did you think he was a danger to himself?"

"No. That never enter my head. I take very little notice. I conclude that was acting silly. Boys do act silly, so I take very little notice except to think a good sousing in cold water bring that back to his senses."

"Instead of which, the good sousing drowned him. What can you tell me about that?"

"That was a long way ahead of where I work when that happen."

"Quite so. Did you see anybody besides the boy and the two Huckles?"

"Ah, but he was fishing."

"I suppose this man was called as a witness at the inquest? What was his name?"

"That wasn't called."

"Did you mention him to the coroner?"

“Why should I? ’twadn’t no business o’ mine.”

Dame Beatrice made a swift calculation of how far she could go without causing the old fellow to wonder what her real object was in asking so many questions, and decided to take the bull by the horns. His appearance as a witness in the coroner’s court must have given Teek something to talk about for the rest of his life, she supposed, and the probability was that he would take it for granted that others were as interested in the details as he was himself.

“There is some question about the property,” she said vaguely, thus supporting the reason she had given for her enquiries. “The family are anxious to contact everybody who may have noticed the boy’s behaviour that day. It needs to be established whether he was out of his mind.”

“Out of his mind? If that was anything, that was drunk.”

“Drunk? But he was a boy of only fifteen! Who would have served him with drink?”

“Nobody, not in a public house, of course, ma’am. That lose them their licence. But any farmhouse keep a jug of cider handy, and that’s heady stuff, our Norfolk cider, if you have enough of it. People mean it kindly, but if a youngster isn’t accustomed to it—and they say in the court that was an abstainer and the son of an abstainer —”

“Yes, I see. And you think a glass of cider would have been enough to account for the way he was behaving? It certainly could be so. Did you see him eating his lunch?”

“Ah. That have sandwiches and a bag full of ripe little darkish fruit. Look like tomatoes to me, but I didn’t much notice. Then that take out a book and sprawl himself down for a read. I go on working for a bit, then I have my dinner and a bit of a sleep, then I wake up because of the hullabaloo.”

“The boy?”

"That shout and sing and stagger about. Then that go stumbling out of my sight, still a-laughing and a-bellering."

"How far was the fisherman from where the boy had his lunch?"

"Three hundred yards."

"Was he the same side of the river?"

"No, that fish from the opposite bank, with a rod as thick as my thumb."

"Did you keep this fisherman in sight all the time you were working?"

"That move off."

"Did you actually see him go?"

"No. That must have gone while I was asleep."

"And you didn't see him again?"

"No, nor think about him till now."

"Could you describe him, do you think?"

The old man narrowed his eyes.

"I'd know him again," he said slowly. "Ah, for sure I'd know him again."

"A big man? Tall? Stout?"

"Noo, I couldn't say. All I knoo is as he wore a yeller wesket. In shirt sleeves that was, with a yeller wesket, and a grey jacket by his side on the grass."

"Young, old, middle-aged?"

"No, I can't tell you. But I'd know him again. Once seen, always remembered; that's Tom Teek."

Dame Beatrice realised that the old man had told her all he could. One of her theories now seemed rather more likely than the others, but she needed time to think it over and then to experiment with it. She thanked Teek warmly and begged him to drink her health, which the old fellow, thanking her in return, blithely promised to do.

"And now," she said, "back to the inn at Camber, George, for lunch. We have not solved the mystery yet, by any means, but we make a little progress."

George, a bachelor who liked domesticity, had arranged to have all his meals with the family who kept the inn. Dame Beatrice had a late lunch alone in the dining-room, before she returned on foot to Camber Abbey. Her first question was put to Ethel as soon as she arrived.

"Ethel, what happened to the tomatoes?"

Ethel flushed darkly, but did not attempt to evade the question or pretend that she did not understand it.

"Bumby-hole, madam."

"You threw them away?"

"Didn't want the master poisoned."

"That does you a certain amount of credit, if it is true. What makes you so certain that it was the tomatoes which made you ill?"

"Something seemed to tell me. Besides, I was sick and you couldn't mistake it. I had the doctor to me."

"Was there any chance that the tomatoes could have been retrieved from the dust-heap?"

"No. I go and dance on the nasty things."

"I see. But, Ethel, did it never occur to you that Stephen Camber must have eaten some of the tomatoes?"

"Yes, madam, but what could I do about that? Poor Master Stephen was dead and drowned before it came to me what that was. It wasn't till Mr. Hugh took over that it seem to come all over me that Master Stephen had not been drunk like they say, but must have got at the tomatoes."

"Ethel, where did those tomatoes come from?"

"I couldn't say, madam. I took it they come from Tom Adams, but when I tax him with it, he turn so hard that I didn't like to press it and so I conclude to let it go at that."

"I see. Very well, Ethel. Don't worry yourself about this conversation."

Ethel hesitated and then burst out:

“It *wasn't* the tomatoes as killed him! It wasn't the tomatoes! He was drowned, I tell you... drowned!”

CHAPTER NINE

Penelope and the Suitors

"I freeze, I freeze, and nothing dwells
In me but Snow and ysicles.
For pitties sake, give your advice,
To melt this snow, and thaw this ice."

Robert Herrick

"And now," said Dame Beatrice on the following morning,
"to dismiss from the case, as it were, Penelope's suitors."

Hugh frowned.

"It still seems to me that one of them might be implicated," he said. "Héloïse simply hasn't the temperament for really dirty deeds."

"What did you make of the tomatoes? Of the story of Ethel the Misguided, I mean."

"Nothing. The mystery is—who put them in the dining-room so that she was able to help herself to them?"

"Do the Adams grow tomatoes in your greenhouses?"

"Yes, I believe so. I don't happen to care for tomatoes and, in any case, they are not in season now."

"But they *were* in season when Ethel purloined them from the dining-room and when Stephen took them on his picnic. Still, I do not suspect the Adams of any desire to make away with your cousin Paul or his son."

"What *do* you suspect, then?"

"Possibly that a mysterious visitor left the tomatoes and that he came with that purpose and that purpose alone. I wonder whether Mr. Paul cared for tomatoes?"

"Surely that is a purely academic point? Paul took no harm from them, so far as we know. I can't think why the doctor didn't tell him about them, though."

“Possibly your cousin was a man who thought that a local G.P. was suitable for the servants but not sufficiently so for himself. I would like to talk to Dr. Castleton again, this time in private.”

“Medical shop, eh? A very sound idea, if I may say so.”

“He suspected the presence of a weak dose of atropine, of course, but he also concluded that Ethel must be peculiarly allergic to the drug if she thought she got it from eating the tomatoes.”

“But do tomatoes contain or secrete atropine?”

“Not in any measurable quantity, if at all. But there are ‘sports’ in Nature, are there not?—and the tomato belongs to a group of plants in which measurable quantities of atropine *can* be found.”

“So that’s still your theory! A ‘sport’ tomato plant and an allergic Ethel?”

“Not necessarily, but it is a much more comfortable one than others I have formulated.”

“As we realised before of course, Stephen must have been equally allergic to atropine in a ‘sport’ tomato. Rather strange, that. Do you place any reliance upon the theory that Ethel may have been his mother, and that she transmitted this particular allergy to him?”

“No. The young are often affected by these things more severely than are older people,” said Dame Beatrice, with deliberate vagueness.

“He was fifteen years old, not three,” retorted Hugh.

“When I have spoken with the doctor, I shall track down Mr. Maitland and Mr. Tunstall,” said Dame Beatrice, briskly turning the conversation. “No, perhaps I had better reverse the processes. I will leave a message at the surgery asking for an appointment, then I will see what I can get from the rejected suitors, and then—may I meet Dr. Castleton here?”

"Of course. The library shall be placed at your disposal."

She decided to visit Tunstall first. His boatyard on the Bure was smaller than some of those higher up the river near Wroxham and in Horning, but there was the same air and atmosphere of preparation about it as there was in the older-established yards.

"Getting ready for the season," said an old man to whom Dame Beatrice addressed herself. "The gaffer? Yes, that will be somewhere about. Bor Tom," he shouted to a passing ancient, "where's gaffer?"

"Inside," replied Tom, jerking a tobacco-stained thumb. Dame Beatrice entered the boathouse and found a man of about thirty, dressed in tweeds and tennis shoes, talking to an older man who was wearing a cap and workman's overalls. Both turned and stared when she walked in.

"Mr. Tunstall?" she said, addressing them equally, although there was no doubt which was master.

"Yes?" replied the tweed suit. He was a dark-haired, fresh-faced, sturdy young man with a brisk air about him.

"I should be very much obliged if you could spare me a few minutes on a private matter. I shall not need to keep you long."

"All right." He followed her on to the quay beside which three motor-cruisers were tied up. "I haven't blotted my copybook in any way, so far as I know."

"It isn't anything like that at all."

"Right. Come aboard and let's sit." He handed her on board the nearest boat and they sat in the well. Although it was a pleasant morning, the air still had the nip of early spring; Dame Beatrice, however, was wearing a fur coat and her companion, she supposed, was impervious to the weather.

"It's about Miss Catherine Tolley."

"Oh, yes?" His eyes became guarded.

"She has been receiving anonymous communications."

"Oh?"

"Others have received them, too. All are on the same note. There appears to be a prejudice, on the part of the writer, against her forthcoming marriage to the man who recently inherited Camber Abbey and its estates."

"Oh, yes?"

"The letters, naturally, are a great annoyance to Miss Tolley and even more so to her fiancé, and they have called me in to track down the writer and put an end to the one-sided correspondence. I am a psychiatrist by profession and they thought my approach might be preferable to that of the police."

"Most of the people who write letters of that sort are unhinged, I've always understood. But how do you think I can help? You don't suppose I wrote the beastly things, do you?"

"I have to retain an open mind, Mr. Tunstall, but I confess that you seem to me a most unlikely candidate. What I *do* want from you—in complete confidence, of course—is a pointer, if you can give me one. You know Miss Tolley very well, or so I am led to believe. You know her circle of acquaintances, too, no doubt?"

"Not as well as you might think. It's true I once proposed to her, but I'm afraid I was carried away. It was at a ball at the Assembly Rooms in Norwich during the Festival of Britain in 1951."

"You cannot think of anybody who might feel, let us say, like a dog in the manger?"

"Not a clue. Sorry. If anybody is annoying Catherine I'd like to help you find him. I suppose"—his candid eyes met hers—"it isn't the *chap* he wants to annoy?"

"It is more than possible. Do you know Mr. Hugh Camber?"

“Never met him. I can’t say I *knew* the other one, the one who was drowned. He kept a yacht at Horning and I’ve had him pointed out to me as he sailed by, but I never exchanged a word with him. He never put in at my place.”

“Used his son to sail with him?”

“Frequently. Delicate, thin boy. Queer they should both have been drowned. Both quite good swimmers and it’s not at all dangerous where the boy tumbled in, although it’s fairly deep and there might be weed.”

“That is a most interesting statement. I have seen the place where the boy was drowned, but I had not considered your point about his ability to swim. Well, I need take no more of your time, Mr. Tunstall. I am most grateful to you for suffering me to question you about the letters.”

At Maitland’s farm she was fortunate in finding the owner disengaged. This was not by his own wish. He was recovering from influenza. Dame Beatrice sent up her card and the housekeeper returned to say that Mr. Maitland would be delighted if Dame Beatrice would go up.

“He isn’t infectious,” she added. “That’s just weak and funny-tempered. Do him good to have a visitor to be polite to.”

She led the way up a steep staircase, tapped at a bedroom door, opened it, and showed Dame Beatrice in. The farmer was reclining in a long chair by the window. He was a tall, fair-haired, good-looking man of about forty and when the visitor was announced he began to struggle to his feet.

“Keep still, please, Mr. Maitland, while I explain my errand.” Dame Beatrice walked to the window and looked over the fields. “You will be glad to be out and about again. Do you have many visitors?”

“Nobody’s got much time to spare at this time of year. I did have a visitor yesterday, though—a Miss Tolley, sister of the vicar of Camber.”

“Really, Mr. Maitland? That would appear to simplify matters considerably. I note that you are restraining your very natural curiosity as to the object of my visit, so I will now do my best to explain myself. I am here partly on Miss Tolley’s behalf.”

“She can’t have changed her mind in a day, surely!”

“If you mean what I think you mean, I am afraid she has not. May I ask whether she made any mention of anonymous letters?”

“She did. Both she and this Camber fellow she’s engaged to seem to have had them. But if you’ve come to pump me, I’m afraid I can’t help you. I didn’t write them and I can’t think of anybody around these parts who would.”

“I am not surprised. I have my own theory as to their authorship.”

“It must be a woman. Men don’t write anonymous dirt.”

“The oddest thing about the letters is that they contain almost nothing of that sort. Beyond one reference to Miss Tolley as a harlot, they are not in the least improper. Their one aim and object appears to be to effect a breach between Miss Tolley and Mr. Camber. There are definite accusations of murder against the latter.”

“I say! That seems a bit steep! Does the writer provide chapter and verse, by any chance? Of course, from what I read in the local paper, it does seem to have been a bit of a fluke that this particular Camber inherited the property. Weren’t there two very unexpected deaths?”

“Yes, there were. The previous owner and his young son were both drowned.”

"Well, a coincidence like that is quite enough to start malicious tongues wagging."

"Quite so. And if the letters contained nothing but accusations of murder against Mr. Hugh Camber, I should advise him to turn them over to the police; but the vicar has also received letters and the whole point, as I said before, seems to be that the marriage of Mr. Camber and Miss Tolley shall never take place."

"So you *do* think that I might have had a hand in the letters, do you?" He wagged his broad, fair, Scandinavian head and grinned. "I suppose you know Catherine turned me down, and you think this is a case of Hamlet, revenge!"

Dame Beatrice cackled.

"Miss Tolley was vehement in her assertions that neither you nor Mr. Tunstall could possibly have brought himself to utter those letters, and I agree with her. I agreed with her, I may tell you, before I came here."

"Then may I ask—not that I'm not delighted to have a visitor and one of such distinction, of course, but..."

"Are you a typical Norfolk farmer, Mr. Maitland?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"There is a touch of the Old School Tie about you."

"Dear, dear! Is it so obvious that I went to Marlborough?"

"That would explain it, of course."

"To go back a bit, if we may: if you were sure, before you came, that I wasn't mixed up with this anonymous piffle, why did you come?"

"I hoped you might be able to help me. The letters are a fact, and facts are capable of explanation. Incidentally, the really interesting and worrying thing is that the letters are *not* piffle."

"Meaning?—Good heavens, you don't take these accusations of murder seriously?"

“So seriously that there may be nothing for it but to get the bodies exhumed.”

“Good Lord! You *are* going places! I know your reputation as a private sleuth, of course, but—exhumations!”

“Before we go to those lengths, however, it is necessary for me to go to Scotland and endeavour to obtain first-hand information about the manner of Paul Camber’s death.”

“Oh, yes. Salmon-fishing, wasn’t he?”

“It seems a likely inference.”

“What makes you think it was murder?—just the coincidence of the father and son both being drowned?”

“There was another factor. The boy was said to be drunk. It was the reason given for his falling into the water.”

Maitland studied her, but Dame Beatrice’s black, brilliant, ironic eyes gave nothing away.

“You mean you want to find out whether the father was in the same state when he was drowned?”

“Well, one needs to be cautious about that. You see, whether that state was a state of drunkenness is open to very wide doubt.”

“You make a mystery of it.”

“It is better so, at present. I must have proof. Do you care to tell me any more about your conversation of yesterday with Miss Tolley?”

“Well, it was mostly about the letters. She warned me to be on my guard against you, as you would try to pump me about our past relationship—hers and mine, I mean.”

“Why should you not be pumped about your relationship with her? Was it scandalous?”

Maitland laughed.

“Heavens, no! I proposed at a ball in the Assembly Rooms in Norwich during the celebration of the Festival of Britain in 1951.”

"Oh, *no!*" cried Dame Beatrice, who had learnt this protest of incredulity from her secretary.

"Why not?" Maitland was obviously surprised.

"Well, it seems to have been the fashion to propose to Miss Tolley at the Assembly Rooms in Norwich during the Festival of Britain in 1951."

"Do you mean to tell me...?"

"Yes, I do. It was in that place, and at a ball during that year, that Mr. Tunstall, a boat-builder on the River Bure, also proposed to Miss Tolley and was refused."

"Another coincidence, then! But it couldn't possibly tie up with the deaths of Camber and his son. Of course, I've seen her since then—before yesterday I mean."

"How long had you known Miss Tolley when you proposed to her?"

"Not very long. We were both on one of the many committees which arranged the Norwich Festival items, that's all. It was all a bit hectic, as you can imagine, and people got thrown together quite a bit if they were in the same swim."

"Then it is likely that Mr. Tunstall was also on one of these committees and that Miss Tolley was *his* fellow-member, too?"

"Yes. As a boat-builder, he may have been in on the arrangements for the *Pavilion d'Or*. It visited Norwich during the Festival and the boats were moored at the bridge near Thorpe Station. I remember the *Snow Goose* particularly—a dream of a boat. The *Pavilion d'Or* boats arrived on the Thursday—June 28th it was—and moved off between eight and half-past nine on the Friday morning. I motored over to watch them leave. Some were quite fabulous. I was filled with admiration and green with envy."

"Which committee were you on?"

"Well, there was the pageant, of course. I was one of the people proposed for Parson Woodforde. Hoped I'd

have clicked, but I didn't. A better man got it. Then, being a farmer, I helped a bit with the arrangements for the Norfolk Show. That was not specially Festival stuff, of course. We always have it. I showed sheep—Suffolks—and cattle—Redpolls, English White, and some Shorthorns. I had a couple of Shire horses in, too, and three dogs."

"Your farm must be a very large one."

"No, just average, but I experiment with mixed farming and with various breeds of cattle, all pedigree stuff."

"The Festival must have been a particularly stimulating one in Norwich."

"It was. Personally, from what I heard and read, it seemed to me that we outdid everywhere else for sheer interest and variety. We had the Three Choirs Festival, too—Ely, Peterborough, and Norwich. The Cathedral was packed, of course—people standing, and what not. Interesting Magnificat and a really beautiful Nunc Dimittis, but the Bairstow, I thought, was dull, and the Wesley rather heavy. Of course, the organ is in a silly place and the stone screen muffles sound. You could hear the boys' voices all right from where I was, but the men were difficult to hear except in unaccompanied Gibbon. There they were fine."

"I cannot imagine," said Dame Beatrice, gazing with mild benevolence at Maitland, "why Miss Tolley did not wish to marry you. How, exactly, did you get to know her?—as a member of which committee?"

"Well, she was on the Town Hall staff, a supernumerary taken on just for the Festival. She helped arrange the outings, you know."

"The outings?"

"Yes, to some of the famous houses and castles, and the ruined priories and so forth. I was supposed to be an authority on Binham and, as Catherine had some idea that she might have to conduct one of the coach parties

round the ruins and then on to Holkam Hall, she roped me in to supply some information."

"Ah, yes?"

"I fell in love with her, of course. Nothing like a common interest in architecture to make one see roses, roses all the way."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes. I tried to sweep her off her feet, as the saying is. She gave me the air. My second attempt—at the ball—was equally unsuccessful. But for Binham, I think I might have been lucky. As she's a parson's sister, I suppose she thought the time, the place, and the loved one didn't quite fit together."

"Where did you propose to her?"

"In the abbot's kitchen. It seemed fairly secular, I thought. I mean, I wouldn't have chosen the cloister or the Chapter House."

"I think that shows very nice feeling on your part. And when Miss Tolley refused your offer?"

"I was a trifle dashed, of course. Apart from anything else, one feels a bit of a fool and rather wishes one hadn't rushed in. Still, she was very charming about it and I'm not at all sure she'd have made a farmer's wife, anyway. In fact, I've persuaded myself that she most certainly wouldn't."

"What do you know of Mr. Hugh Camber?"

"Just exactly nothing. Never met him. Didn't know he existed until there was all this stuff in the local papers about two drownings and the unmarried heir coming from London. I'd be interested to meet him, as a matter of fact. Like to know what made Catherine accept him, don't you know."

"He is a man, I should judge, of about forty. He is quiet, humorous, considerate, and kind. Beyond that, which might be said of many men of his age and type, there is nothing to show why he should have been

accepted where Mr. Tunstall and yourself were refused. There is no accounting for these things."

"There's Camber Abbey."

"I should hardly think that would weigh with Miss Tolley, but, again, one can never tell."

"There's a substantial difference, I should have thought, between being a farmer's wife, or marrying into the boatbuilding business, and becoming the mistress of Camber. Still, I'm inclined to agree with you that it probably would not have tipped the scale with a girl like Catherine."

"Who, Mr. Maitland, would be so much against the marriage as to write these letters?"

"Catherine thinks—I suppose it's fair to tell you?"

"That depends upon whether you want the letters to stop."

"I most certainly do. I hate the idea of anonymous mud-slinging. Right, then: Catherine thinks the most likely person is the mother of Camber's heir presumptive. I forget the woman's name."

"You are not alone in advancing the theory that Mrs. Hal Camber is our quarry. I think as you do, so now we shall see."

"There was something very opportune and peculiar about those two deaths," said Maitland. "Wasn't there some scandal about Paul Camber and a farmer's daughter?"

"If it had not been about a farmer's daughter, would you have been likely to hear of it?"

"Probably not. Talk goes round Norwich cattle market, I suppose. Beresford, wasn't it?"

Dame Beatrice nodded. She had found out what she wanted to know. There had been talk about Paul Camber and the Beresford girl and the gossip had been fairly wide-spread.

"Tell me, Mr. Maitland," she said, "whether anything was said about a man named Verith."

"Verith? Verith? I seem to have heard the name...Oh, yes, I know! Wasn't he the fellow that Camber tried to put the blame on?"

"There seems to have been some foundation for that. According to what Mr. Hugh Camber has told me, Verith took the girl to London for a week-end."

"I heard nothing except that Paul Camber had managed to implicate him in some way and had given him the sack because he refused to marry Miss Beresford."

"Yes, he certainly dismissed him from his post."

"Verith seems to have been a bit of a fool, I imagine."

Dame Beatrice reverted to the subject of the letters.

"Suppose it *is* Mrs. Hal Camber who writes them, what would her object be?" She looked expectantly at him, but Maitland shook his head.

"I know nothing about her," he replied, "except what Catherine told me when she warned me you would probably come and accuse me of writing the things myself to try to prevent her marriage. She thought Mrs. Camber had the same idea—to throw a spanner into the works, keep Hugh Camber a bachelor and have the small nephew succeed to the property later on."

"The obstacle in the way of that particular plan is that the estate is not entailed and can be willed away from the family at the owner's whim, so that particular fish won't bite, I'm afraid."

"Then it must just be common or garden spite, I suppose."

"There might be another explanation, don't you think?" Again she looked to him for an opinion, but Maitland merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Unless she thinks Camber killed his two relatives in order to get hold of the property for himself—? You say

the estate was not entailed but could be disposed of by will? How did Paul Camber word his will, I wonder? The boy died before he did, if I remember what I read in the papers. That means that Paul would have re-made his will, so he must have made it in Hugh's favour, I suppose. It might make things look pretty fishy for Hugh if anybody took some of those anonymous letters seriously."

"You seem to know a good deal about the contents of those letters, Mr. Maitland."

Maitland met her sharp black eyes with his level glance.

"I know what Catherine told me. She was rather angry at the thought that you were coming here to accuse me of writing them," he said.

"You know better than to think that about me now. You have, in fact, helped me considerably. You have clarified two thoughts which have been at the back of my mind for some little time."

"I'm glad to hear that."

Dame Beatrice grinned in a conciliatory manner, but she did not answer the unspoken question.

CHAPTER TEN

Gently-Smiling Jaws

"Dim is the rumour of a common fight,
Where host meets host, and many names are sunk;
But of a single combat fame speaks clear."

Matthew Arnold

"We now know of the existence of X," said Dame Beatrice, after dinner that evening. Hugh very carefully lit a cigar and tossed the match into a blazing fire of logs. He then leaned back in his chair and gazed thoughtfully at his guest.

"I understand that you believed Mrs. Hal wrote the letters," he said. Dame Beatrice solemnly nodded.

"I have no doubt about that," she said. "But that is only the beginning of our difficulties."

"How to bring it home to her, you mean?"

"No, I did not mean that. It is more than likely that, after I have seen her, the letters will stop. Then what we have to find is the mind behind those tomatoes. I may be able to find out more about that when I confront Mrs. Camber with the evidence I have against her, but I hardly think so."

"You really intend to face her with this charge of uttering the letters?"

"I do indeed; but I shall be surprised if she proves to be connected with the deaths of your cousin and his son. From whom can I obtain the address at which Paul Camber stayed when he was in Scotland?"

"Mrs. Brunton, who used to be the housekeeper here, will know. I've got her present address. She left it in case any letters should come for her after she'd gone."

“Splendid. Would you mind contacting her, then, and making the necessary enquiry?”

“She’ll be bound to wonder why I want to know.”

“To give a slightly fictional reason might be justified there, I think. Could you not say that you wish to make a pious pilgrimage to the place, or that you—? No, a pious pilgrimage is the best. Not only is it, in a sense, true (of me, if not of yourself, since you will not be going), but she will approve of the proper feeling you will be showing. If you say you want to go salmon-fishing she may think you cold-blooded.”

“Right. I’ll send to her at once.”

“And I will descend like an avenging angel upon Mrs. Hal Camber. Where does she live?”

Hugh wrote down the address of Mrs. Hal’s flat.

“Will you come back here when you’ve talked to her?” he asked.

“Not immediately, unless it seems absolutely necessary to do so. I must look in at my London clinic and see my secretary. If I *am* coming back straight away, I will telephone you, but my present plan is to go to Scotland as soon as I get that address from Mrs. Brunton.”

“Right. I’ll send it to you at...?”

“I shall remain at my house in Kensington until I get it.”

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning, her car left Norfolk for London. There she looked up Mrs. Hal in the telephone directory and intimated that she proposed to call on her. Mrs. Hal, who sounded flustered, suggested three o’clock on the following afternoon but added that, on her tiny income and with a son to keep, she could not afford to assist charities, even the most deserving. Dame Beatrice reassured her and rang off, surprised that so astute a schemer as she conceived Mrs. Hal to be should have accepted her bona fides without question.

A very youthful maid answered the door. The flat was on the third floor of a converted Edwardian residence and—there was no doubt about it—it was shabby. Dame Beatrice, however, felt no compunction. She disliked anonymous missives more than she disliked professional money-lenders and almost as much as she disliked blackmail. She came to the point at once.

“Mrs. Camber, when it is necessary I represent authority. I hope it will not be necessary in this case. These letters you are sending to Norfolk must stop at once.”

There was not as much stuffing in Mrs. Hal as she had been led to expect. The little woman began to bluster, but her white face and frightened eyes told their own story. In the face of her denials, Dame Beatrice said calmly:

“Your child can be questioned, you know. He addressed the envelopes. Furthermore, I am prepared to get the police to check your movements at the various places between London and Norwich where you posted the letters. I advise you to drop the whole thing, Mrs. Camber. It can do no good to your son, your possible future husband, or yourself.”

“I...there is no question of a future husband! I am true to my first husband’s memory.”

“It will be as well, perhaps, for you if you are!”

“It isn’t fair!” cried Mrs. Hal, tears springing to her eyes. “It isn’t fair! Why should my child be deprived? Why should I have to live in this sort of squalor when little Peter could be the owner of Camber if only Hugh wouldn’t be so wicked and selfish!”

“His forthcoming marriage you mean, of course. I can understand your disappointment, but who could have supposed that the other child would be drowned? With him *and* Mr. Hugh Camber between your son and the ownership of the property, you could hardly have had hopes of the inheritance.”

“How did you find out that Peter addressed the envelopes?”

“It was a child’s writing and the anonymous letters could only have come from you. You learnt from Peter, who stayed with him while you were in hospital, that Mr. Hugh Camber was proposing to marry. You learnt, from the same source, the name of the girl and where she lived.”

“My child is innocent!”

“I am perfectly sure of that. The crime of using the information he gave you, in the way it has been used, is yours, of course. You yourself wrote the letter you claimed to have received while you were in hospital. You thought that, if you could show that you also were a victim of the anonymous hand, you could not be suspected of having provided that hand. It is the oldest and most uniformly unsuccessful trick of all, as you would have realised if you had given a little more thought to the matter instead of embarking upon a rather contemptible little game of bluff. Well, I have given you my advice. No more letters.”

She took her leave upon these last words and did not wait for the maid-servant to show her out. Mrs. Hal, however, after a moment of hesitation, almost ran after her and caught up with her at the foot of the stairs.

“I’m really grateful,” panted Héloïse. “It was good of you to come. I’m quite upset with myself. I was cross when I knew that Hugh had decided to marry. After all, you can’t really blame a mother for trying to stand up for her child’s rights.”

“But it was not a question of his rights, Mrs. Camber. It might have been a question of his good fortune, but nothing more. Mr. Hugh Camber is in a position, I understand, to do what he will with the Abbey?”

“You are very hard, Dame Beatrice!”

“Clear-headed, perhaps. Good day, Mrs. Camber.”

She returned to the tall narrow house in Kensington to find her secretary with a dozen or more requests for appointments.

"I haven't made any," said Laura, "because I didn't know when you were likely to be free. Oh, and there's a telegram."

Dame Beatrice sheafed through the letters.

"Nothing there that cannot wait until I get back from Scotland," she said.

"Scotland! When do we go? Kindly remember that it is my native land, the land I love the most. You *do* want an escort, don't you? Whereabouts in Scotland?"

Dame Beatrice answered the last question first, but not until she had opened and read the telegram. As she anticipated, it came from Hugh Camber, and read:
Brunton hotel near Strathpeffer called Osseuch Hydro.

"Near Strathpeffer," said Dame Beatrice. "The Osseuch Hydropathic Hotel—"

"Oh, I know it! At least, I know *of* it. So that's where we go? Does Mr. Camber come with us?" demanded Laura.

"No. He would only embarrass the enquiry at this stage. Later on we may require his help, but the preliminary negotiations must be conducted by experts."

"Many thanks for putting the ultimate *mot* in the plural. When do we start?"

"As soon as I have been in communication with Robert."

"But Gavin doesn't cut any ice in Scotland—apart from being a Scot himself, I mean."

"His writ will run sufficiently for me to impress the hotel manager, child. Please get New Scotland Yard on the telephone and find out whether your husband can dine with us."

On the following morning she and Laura were driven northwards to Harrogate, where they spent the night.

From Harrogate next day they crossed the Border and spent the night in Edinburgh, where both had friends and Laura an aunt. Laura visited her aunt, but Dame Beatrice ignored the friends and spent the following morning perusing newspaper files.

"Our progress seems a bit leisurely," said Laura, "if we're on the track of a murderer." The two of them had met for lunch and Dame Beatrice had announced the result of her researches.

"You anticipate, child. All I expect to obtain from this excursion is a little more information about Mr. Paul Camber's last holiday and an indication, I hope, of his state of mind immediately before his death," she said. "Curious that he was wearing no jacket when he was found, and that the body was only partly submerged."

"That means you haven't ruled out suicide, then?"

"Mr. Hugh Camber has ruled it out, but, considering that Mr. Paul had recently suffered the loss of his only son, I am not prepared to be dogmatic."

"This Mrs. Hal Camber—?"

"We shall see. You have heard of a pawn on the chessboard, no doubt?"

They reached Strathpeffer in due course and were well received at the Osseuch Hydro Hotel. It was a few miles out of the town and was the haunt, it appeared, of salmon fishers, for the Falls of Osseuch were famous and the salmon, still fairly fresh from the sea, in good shape in spite of the fact that they were already on starvation diet preparatory to spawning in the late autumn.

Dame Beatrice booked rooms for a fortnight. The trail of the murderer (if there *was* one) would be so old, she decided, that a delay of up to ten or fourteen days in attempting to find evidence of it would make no difference to the outcome of the enquiry. The month of March was almost at its end but, in spite of the cold

weather and the promise of more snow, Laura, she felt, would enjoy having her feet upon her native heath.

Dame Beatrice herself soon discovered enough to lend considerable weight to her original theory. Paul Camber might not have been entirely alone when he was drowned. He had set off in the early morning in a chauffeur-driven hired car, accompanied by a Mr. Smith.

"This Mr. Smith was another guest at the hotel, I take it?" Dame Beatrice said to the hall porter. It appeared that Mr. Smith had joined Mr. Camber during the third day of his stay. They had often gone out together, usually for fishing. Dame Beatrice sought out the receptionist.

"Have you Mr. Smith's home address?"

"I could scarcely give you that, madam."

"Very proper. Perhaps I could see the manager."

"Certainly." The girl smiled and Dame Beatrice nodded.

"The English police," she said, when he appeared, "have reason to believe, in spite of the findings at the inquest, that Mr. Camber's death was no accident, but was the result of foul play. As I am attached to the Home Office in a special capacity, that of consulting psychiatrist, I am making some preliminary enquiries in order to find out whether there are any grounds upon which the police can proceed." She produced such formidable credentials that the hotel manager cautiously agreed to answer her questions.

"What did he really look like, this Mr. Smith with whom Mr. Camber seems to have gone fishing?" she enquired.

"Oh, a man of middle height, stocky, dark-haired, clean-shaven. There would be a hundred, maybe a thousand, like him."

"An Englishman?"

"Not a Scot, maybe. He had a queer, sing-song accent."

"Have you any idea of his profession or occupation?"

"No, no, but I put him down as an open-air kind of man—although I could not say why. He talked mainly of salmon-fishing, as was natural, although, to my mind, he knew very little about it."

"When Mr. Camber went fishing, did he go alone?"

"He went out alone until Mr. Smith joined him."

"Smith can be a Scottish name, can it not?"

"Aye, but it can be English, too."

"Did he catch salmon?—Mr. Camber, I mean."

"He had great stories always, but we saw no fish. Maybe he would have sent them straight to England without bringing them back here, but it is most unlikely. He was the kind of man to flourish a big fish."

"True of all anglers, I dare say." She departed in search of her secretary and they went in to dinner. Early next morning she had the car brought round and, having enquired the way to the Falls of Osseuch, she and Laura went to visit them.

"This is as near as I can get the car, madam," said her chauffeur, respectfully and with regret, pulling up on the narrow hill-road opposite an unobtrusive signpost which read: *Falls of Osseuch*. "It will be down the path there, but I am informed it involves very rough walking."

"We shall manage," said Dame Beatrice; and, accompanied by Laura, she essayed a downhill, steepish slope broken here and there by boulders. About a quarter of a mile of walking brought them within sight of the river as it leapt, foamed, cascaded, and roared over and around the formidable rocks in its bed. It was a notable salmon-leap and a very impressive one.

"So this is the place?" said Laura. "Do you mind if I leave you here to admire the view while I have a scramble around?"

"I shall be glad to have a little time for thought, child. Scramble as you will, but do not break a limb if you can

help it." She climbed on to a boulder of convenient height and gazed with pensive interest at the foaming river, and, from time to time, followed the progress of her secretary, as Laura, emulating the chamois, leapt, as it seemed to her fascinated employer, from crag to crag when she was not negotiating the smooth and treacherous rocks which offered a precarious surface of clay-like colour and slipperiness on the higher banks of the stream.

Behind her she heard the sound of footsteps. She turned her head and saw a young man approaching. She came to a decision, got up, and barred his way. He stopped politely and raised his tweed hat.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"If you will. The cousin of a friend of mine was drowned here while he was fishing. Whereabouts would he have fallen in? You may have read of the occurrence. It happened last summer. A man named Camber—"

"Oh, yes, I heard about that."

"I really should like to see the place."

"Oh, well, look here, if I give you a hand, I daresay you can manage to get down, and then I can show you the very spot, if local gossip can be trusted."

"That is extremely kind of you. We could not imagine how it happened, but I suppose anybody playing a fish could slip into the river from those rocks."

"If he'd hooked a big fish he might have missed his footing, I suppose, but the fact seems to have been"—he paused and weighed up his companion carefully—"he seems, from all accounts, to have been extremely drunk at the time."

"But I understood that he was alone when he was drowned."

"My story comes from local gossip, as I indicated, but there isn't much doubt about its truth. The people around these parts are not given to exaggeration. They appear to

have been deeply shocked by his rather uninhibited behaviour.”

“How did he behave?”

“Oh, laughing and shouting and staggering about, so I heard. There seems to have been a coach-driver with a party from Lancashire who came down to look at the Falls and try to get a glimpse of a salmon. The driver swore to his condition.”

“These details do not appear to have engaged any interest at the time.”

“Well, the man was drowned, and drunkenness, in itself, is not exactly a crime. Now, mind how you come! This path is steep and a bit slippery. Let me give you a hand.”

At the foot of the precipitous little path there was a congestion of variously-shaped rocks. Her conductor insisted upon hauling Dame Beatrice up the smooth, slightly inclined surface of what appeared to be a species of greenish clay but which was as firm as granite beneath her feet, and from the top of it he indicated the igneous rocks and the granite boulders which lay in the course of the stream. He pointed:

“He must have gone in about there.”

Dame Beatrice followed the pointing finger, at first with her eyes and then (to the almost ludicrous horror of the stranger) by descending, with the sure-footed confidence of a goat, to the edge of the wild waters. There was a deep pool under the rocky margin of the stream, an oasis of quiet, peat-brown innocence beyond which the foaming torrent leapt and sang.

In a moment the fisherman was beside her, and they stood side by side, their elbows touching, on a narrow neck of rock, a tiny peninsula around the end of which the deep brown pool was placidly untroubled by the turbulence of the stream. Behind them Laura’s voice spoke softly.

“Well, well! I thought I was the one to do the scrambling!”

“So you are, child, so you are,” said Dame Beatrice, without turning her head. Her companion was considerably startled, however, and only Dame Beatrice’s iron fingers on his coat-sleeve prevented him from tumbling into the river. “I can see how easily it could happen,” she went on, conversationally. “Yes, indeed. Have you regained your balance?”

“Thanks, yes. I’m much obliged to you. I should hate to fall in just here.”

“Very narrow, and obviously dangerous, much more so than the pool in which Mr. Camber’s body was found. And now I think I will just cross the river for the view. May I enquire your name?”

“Wayland. Can I help you up the slope?”

“No, no. Laura will cope. The little path I espied as we descended to water-level should lead to the bridge, I fancy. Yes, the stream is noticeably narrow, here in the gorge. I suppose one would call it a gorge? It is as narrow, one would say, as the weedy dyke in Norfolk in which Paul Camber’s son met his death.”

“Yes, quite as narrow,” said Wayland.

“So there’s our murderer,” said Laura, when they had left him well behind and were almost in sight of their car.

“You jump to conclusions, child.”

“And how! Do you really mean to tell me that this Wayland didn’t follow us down here to find out what we were up to?”

“Who can say? But your natural instincts are not altogether at fault. There is something very interesting about Mr. Wayland. I wonder...”

“I don’t,” said Laura, with finality. “I don’t wonder at all. I’m sure he followed us. Didn’t you notice him flapping his ears when you were talking to the receptionist this morning? If I hadn’t seen through him and come along

when I did, I wouldn't put it past him to have pushed you into the river."

"I had no such eventuality in mind, child. I do agree, however, that we should not altogether lose sight of Mr. Wayland, although I do not believe that Wayland is his name."

"There you are, you see. You *do* think he was up to N.B.G. *My* instinct, indeed. What about your own? I certainly think we should hang about and keep an eye on him for a bit. It strikes me he could bear watching pretty closely. You notice that he knew about the boy's death? That means that he's got a pretty fishy finger in the pie."

Dame Beatrice made no reply, and they climbed the steep and muddy path to where the chauffeur was waiting with the car.

"There is just one thing," said Dame Beatrice, when she got back to the hotel, "that I have to enquire of you, Mr. McKintyre. You remember that, on the morning of his death, Mr. Camber left here in a hired car accompanied by Mr. Smith?"

"Only so that Mr. Camber could be put off at the Osseuch Water to fish, while Mr. Smith went on to Strathpeffer station to catch the London train."

"And *did* he catch it?"

"Oh, yes. He was sworn to at the station. The Fiscal would have required his evidence if he had been with Mr. Camber at the time of the drowning."

"Yes, of course."

"So that's that," said Laura.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Wayland, but Not Smith

"No drought upon thy wanton waters fall
To make them Leane, and languishing at all.
No ruffling winds come hither to discease
Thy pure, and Silver-Wristed Naides.
Keep up your state, ye streams; and as ye spring,
Never make sick your Banks by surfeiting."

Robert Herrick

"It's just one of those things," argued Laura, as they drove back to the hotel, "which makes the astute sleuth say 'Ha, ha, among the trumpets.' You can argue as you like, but I'm absolutely convinced that Wayland knows more about the death of Paul Camber than he's prepared to say, and, because of that, he's going to keep the tabs on us because we're rather obviously interested."

"That does not mean that he murdered him. It only means that it matters to him that Paul and Stephen Camber died."

"What do we do now, anyway?"

"You are to instruct me in the art and craft of salmon-fishing, child."

"Why?"

"It was while he was fishing for salmon that Paul Camber was drowned. As I make my perfect cast, something may come to me..."

"Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful..."

"...to give me the exact knowledge which I lack. Have you anything better to suggest?"

"Yes, I have. As I see it, the next thing to do is to bombard this Wayland with shrewd and penetrating

questions until he lets fall some pearl of truth which will either incriminate him or lead to the real murderer.”

“We are not in a position to bombard him. No, no. The salmon-rod and some unbiased, well-informed instruction are what I require, not to speak of waders, a fish-basket, and the wherewithal to gaff the salmon when I have it safely hooked.”

Laura, always willing and ready (as she herself expressed it) to try anything once, entered into the spirit of the thing and began, on the following morning, to initiate her employer into the mysteries of the greased line, the dry fly, the upstream cast, and the lure.

“Funny thing,” she remarked chattily when they had been into Strathpeffer and, upon the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, had armed Dame Beatrice with the requisite materials for her newly-chosen sport, “but, as salmon are thought not to feed in rivers (although some aver that they do), nobody really knows why they go for the bait.”

“An interesting life-cycle, that of the salmon,” Dame Beatrice responded. “I have been reading about it. It would be incredible if it did not happen to be true. From alevin to parr, from parr to smolt, from smolt to grilse, and from grilse to fully-grown salmon; from river bed or spawning redd, from trout-like hue to silver, the cock from silver to a sullen red, the hen from sheen of silver to dull lead...”

Laura looked at her with the suspicious gaze she kept for her employer’s wilder but more knowledgeable poesies.

“Hm!” she said. “You ought to get more sleep instead of doing so much reading in bed.”

Dame Beatrice leered at her.

“I did not wish you to begin with a complete Philistine who had no conception of the honour which was about to

be paid her," she said. "I could go on, for I have studied my subject closely, as you observe."

"No, no. I expect I've read it all somewhere. Salmon are ugly brutes. Stupid, too. This insistence on re-visiting their birthplace seems to me a compulsion neurosis of the dimmer, more inexplicable kind. It's morbid. You'd think they'd choose bigger and better rivers rather than those in which they happened first to have seen the light. Salmon lack vision and are uninstructed in the American way of life."

"Not Canadian salmon, child. And now, what about some sherry before lunch?"

They went into the small cocktail bar. This, at the Hydro, was a mere slip of an ante-room partitioned off from the immense entrance hall in which were displayed cases of trout and salmon, each item brass-plated with information of its weight, its successful opponent, the date on which it had been caught, and the exact location of the battlefield on which it had met defeat.

Stuffed olives, just before lunch, were more to Laura's taste than stuffed fish. She led the way to one of the small, inconvenient, rickety tables in the bar, established her employer in the slightly less uncomfortable of the chairs, and took the two steps necessary to reach the bar counter. Returning with two charged glasses, she almost ran into Wayland, as the passage between bar and tables was so narrow.

"Hullo! Join us," she said hospitably. "What will you have?"

"No, no, thanks, thanks," said Wayland. "But I'll sit at your table if I may."

"Good chance to pump him!" hissed Laura, behind her hand when she had put down the glasses and was seated. "Do you want me to take my drink elsewhere?"

"I think we might all go into the lounge," said Dame Beatrice. "It is unpleasantly claustrophobic in here." She

grinned with crocodile duplicity at Wayland when he turned from the bar to set down his glass. "What do you say, Mr. Wayland? Shall we withdraw?"

Wayland asked the barman for a tray, set the three glasses on it, and jerked his head towards the door.

"There's nobody in the lounge," he said. "We can have a very cosy conversation and you can pump me as much as you like. I'll be very glad to swop information with you, provided that you'll agree it shall be a swop and not merely a come-clean on my part."

"At present I am not prepared to make such a bargain as you suggest. I am here on official business. You, I imagine, certainly are not. You are dreeing your own weird, I take it. Well, Mr. Wayland, on one point I can reassure you. I am as interested in the deaths of Paul Camber and his son as you are. And now..."

"Yes?"

"Is your name really Wayland?"

Wayland stared at her.

"Well—yes, it is," he replied, "in a way."

"That seems a cautious answer. Would you care to enlarge upon it in any way?"

"You asked me whether it was my name. Well, here you are, then. *Part* of my name, a long time ago, was Wayland. How's that?"

"Excellent. Before I tell you why I am interested in the deaths of Mr. Paul Camber and his son Stephen, I am going to tell you that I can guess the rest of your name, the name by which you were known in the village of Camber and at Camber Abbey."

"Oh? I don't see how you can guess, but you seem to have done. Still, need we go into that? Walls have ears! I see that you know who I am; but to have it broadcast might interfere with what I am trying to establish."

"And that is?"

“That, in coming up here, Paul Camber was running away from his conscience and his responsibilities. What do you say to that?”

“I say that I am certain Paul Camber’s son was murdered and that I am prepared to go to all lengths in order to find the murderer and expose him. As for you, Mr. Wayland, when you talk about Paul Camber’s conscience and his responsibilities, you are not, I take it, making any reference to the death of Stephen Camber?”

Wayland smiled, but it was a bitter grimace. “I mean that Paul, I am almost certain, was the father of the Beresford girl’s baby,” he said.

“You may well be right. Farmer Beresford would agree with you, I think.”

“I wish I’d known that at the time, before I gave in my notice.”

“Or were dismissed, you mean.”

“Dismissed?” Wayland frowned, put down his glass, and leaned across the table. “Paul Camber, as you seem to know, did his utmost to ruin me. I let him talk me...”

“Bribe you...”

“I let him talk and/or bribe me into doing a damn-silly thing and he made capital out of it in a way I hadn’t suspected he might. Oh, I bought it! I’m not whining. All the same...”

There was a long pause while Wayland picked up his glass and twirled it thoughtfully. He did not attempt to complete his remark, but added, at last, “What makes you suspect that young Stephen Camber was murdered?”

“I do not suspect it. I am certain of it, Mr. Wayland. What is more, you share my belief and you have a definite idea that you could name the murderer. Come, now. Our aims are identical. Tell me what you know.”

“If I *knew*, I think I *would* tell you. The trouble is that I don’t know. In any case, it’s too late for the information to be of the slightest value. Besides, if I’m not careful, I

myself could be shown to have a motive—the sort of thing, at any rate, that the police would consider to be a motive...”

“Not a motive to kill Stephen, but a reason for revenging yourself on Paul—yes, yes, I had thought of that. You would do better to trust me, Mr. Wayland.”

“Maybe. Later on, perhaps I will. But there are other things to do first.”

“Up here in Scotland?”

“Well, I feel I’ve exhausted all other possibilities.”

“You are looking for something, perhaps?”

Wayland stared at her.

“I’m looking for evidence, the same as you are.” He swallowed what was left in his glass, pushed it aside, rose from the table, and walked unsteadily out of the lounge.

“He can’t be *tight!*” observed Laura, gazing after him. “Is he ill?”

“Time will show, child. Meanwhile, let us go in to lunch, and then I must speak to the manager again.”

“Why? Are we going to complain?”

“No, no. It is an excellent hotel. But come with me, by all means. A witness may be most useful. Besides, your presence will reassure Mr. McKintyre. He, I am astounded to observe, is inclined to change colour at the sight of me. I cannot imagine why.”

“Guilty conscience. I expect he is always wondering how soon his sins will find him out. He knows your reputation, I have no doubt, and will have discovered by this time that you are attached to the Home Office.”

“I told him so, therefore that should scarcely trouble him. Will you take Scotch broth, followed by Scotch beef?”

“Certainly. And cheese as well as a sweet at the end. I always eat like a horse when my foot is on the heather. When are we going fishing?”

“This afternoon, as soon as our interview is over.”

There was no doubt that the manager looked uneasily at Dame Beatrice when she entered his office after lunch. She seated herself in a proffered chair.

"I trust," he said, "that you are comfortable here, Dame Beatrice?"

"Oh, very. This has nothing to do with the hotel. May I rely upon your discretion, Mr. McKintyre?"

"Surely, surely."

"From our previous conversation you will have realised that I am here upon an important mission. I now want to know whether Mr. Wayland, a guest staying in this hotel, was also present when the late Mr. Paul Camber was with you."

"No, he was not."

"Could you say whether he was in the neighbourhood?"

"I could not say that."

"He seems to have clear knowledge of the exact spot where Mr. Camber fell into the river."

"He was not known to anyone here, but, no doubt, if he was hereabouts at all, he would have read the account in the newspapers."

"Ah, yes. Have you ever had another person of the same name staying here?"

"No. It is a name I should remember. Wayland? No, no, I am sure not."

"Had Mr. Paul Camber ever stayed here before?"

"Oh, yes. He was not a newcomer. We had had him twice before. That was one reason for our being so upset about his death."

"Did he not bring his son with him on previous visits?"

"No. He told us about him and promised to bring him when he was older. A delicate laddie, we understood, and not ready for the rigours of our northern climate."

"He usually came earlier in the year than he did this last time, then?"

"Much earlier. In April, both times, but nearer the end of the month."

"Was he ever accompanied by his wife?"

"No, no. His wife had been dead for some years, we understood."

"He invariably came here alone, then?"

"Yes, he came here alone. I was surprised when Mr. Smith joined him."

"I understand that this hotel owns the fishing-rights on the Osseuch water and that all guests have permission to fish there?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"And what were some of those questions in aid of, please?" enquired Laura, when they had left the sanctum. "You've never thought that *Hugh* Camber ever came up here with Paul, have you?"

"No, child, but, now that we know he did not, colour is lent to his claim that he had not seen his cousin since Stephen Camber's christening. It only lends colour, of course. It is no sort of proof. I did not expect that Mr. Verith—to give our Mr. Wayland the rest of his name—would have been here, and on friendly terms, with Paul Camber. Their quarrel about the girl Beresford would prevent it. Well, well, let us array ourselves for the task in hand, and then George can convey us to the river. I do not feel that I shall need my waders today. My rod and tackle will be sufficient. Tuition in casting, as I am armed with a twelve-foot salmon-rod and an oil-dressed silk line, should be sufficient for the first afternoon, without my trying to catch fish."

"Wonder who else will be down there?"

"If there is anybody else on the river, I shall not fish today, unless, perchance, we should meet Mr. Wayland Verith at the Falls."

"What do you really think happened to Paul Camber up here?" asked Laura. Dame Beatrice told her to use her

intelligence. Laura disdained to reply to this suggestion and soon they were on their way. They were fortunate enough to find the rocks beside the rushing, tumbling river quite deserted.

"Let's go up on the bridge, for a start," suggested Laura. "There's nothing to get your cast entangled with up there."

It was a very narrow suspension bridge and it spanned the river just above the grandest part of the falls. Dame Beatrice declined to use it except for crossing the river.

"I shall cast from the opposite bank," she said. "It is fairly open there and will suit my purpose better than if I tried first from this side. It is delightfully sheltered in this gorge. There is no wind to speak of. It should make my task very easy. I wonder what the weather was like when Paul Camber and his son met their deaths?"

"What game are you playing?" demanded Laura. Dame Beatrice cackled in a secretive way and replied: "You had better come and see."

They made their precarious way by the path, which was blocked by smooth rocks and rough boulders, to the high, narrow bridge. It swung and swayed as they walked. They paused, half-way across, to admire the view which was almost too picturesque to seem quite real. When they reached the opposite bank, which, unlike the one they had left, was grassy and spongy, Laura repeated her question.

"This game," said Dame Beatrice. She took the rod which Laura had been carrying and, to the mingled consternation and amusement of her secretary, ignored the hook which Laura handed her and took from her pocket an old leather glove. From this she extracted a hook with which, thought the startled secretary, she could have caught a shark.

“Now,” she said, handing the rod to Laura, “I want you to place that hook on that black rock on the opposite bank.”

“Good heavens!” cried Laura, who did not lack intelligence. “So *that’s* your idea, is it?”

The gorge was narrow and the hook, considering its size, seemed to be unnaturally light. Laura took her stance, her left leg braced but not stiff, her right knee slightly bent, raised the rod, and gave the classic backward flick which brought the line under control. Then, as the rod reached the vertical, she let the line extend behind her and then flicked forward. It was a beautiful cast and it landed on the rock which Dame Beatrice had indicated.

“That’s it, then,” said her employer. “I just wanted to prove that it could be done.”

“But where did you get such a hook?”

“I had it specially made and brought it with me. I have more, but we shall not need them, and, as I see someone approaching, that is just as well.”

“So you don’t want to learn salmon-fishing after all? I am deeply disappointed,” said Laura. “In any case, I don’t see why we bought you those waders. It would be far too dangerous to step into these rapids.”

“Not where Paul Camber was drowned, child.”

“Ah, but the river was probably a great deal lower at that time of year, you see. Remember, it was high summer.”

“Well, anyone who could make a cast like yours would have had no difficulty in reaching the other side of a narrow Norfolk dyke, so, if we have found the right answer, we know how—”

“Look!” said Laura in a very low tone. In a deep pool, some ten yards from a particularly heavy waterfall, lay a beautiful fish. Laura whipped off Dame Beatrice’s monstrosity of a hook, substituted one she herself had

brought, baited it with a salmon-fly which, when submerged, resembled not a fly but a small fish, and cast.

The salmon was bored and the bait offered the attraction not of food but of fun. It was a beautifully clean-run fish although it had come a good long way up the river. It took the fly. Laura, born and, to some considerable extent, bred in the Highlands, forbore to strike at once. She knew the danger of too precipitate an action. She waited for the familiar heavy tug on the line and, when she felt it, she struck. The great fish, instinctively (it seemed) realising that his only chance was to break the line, attempted a rush upstream, but Laura, manoeuvring him with the skill learned from salmon-fishing father and brother, kept him from the rocks and played him in the comparatively quiet water under the bank. It was a long battle.

"Gaff!" she gasped, as she drew the tired fish in. Dame Beatrice said:

"Hold him. I'll do it." And she did.

"Well!" said Laura, gazing ecstatically at the prize. "What luck! But why did you pretend you knew nothing about salmon-fishing?"

"I have never fished for salmon. My second husband was a keen fisherman, however, and many a meditative hour have I spent in his society, watching, in my dutiful, wifely way, his efforts. I did learn to help him with net and gaff, but my skill extended no further. How do you propose to get your remarkably fine capture to the car? Would you like me to bring George to your assistance?"

"All right, then, but take care how you go. Those rocks on the other side are pretty slippery. Then you'll stay in the car, won't you? There's no point in your coming back again. George and I will cope."

The salmon was acclaimed at the hotel. When the exclamations and the compliments were over and the

great fish had been sent to the kitchen, Dame Beatrice sought still another audience of the manager.

"I want to have Mr. Smith's home address," she said. "Naturally your receptionist was chary of giving it to me, but I must appeal to you to let me have it."

It did not take long to find the entry. Paul Camber's signature and particulars were dated a mere couple of days before those of Smith. He had described himself as Alexander Smith of Girvan.

"Although, if he knew anything of Girvan except by hearsay..." said the manager darkly. Dame Beatrice nodded.

"Do you not require a full address to be entered in your Visitors' Book?" she demanded. The manager shook his head and smiled.

"It should be so, according to the regulations, but we do not insist, as we have usually had a previous communication," he said.

"By letter? You always have written evidence of where your guests come from?"

"Well, no. We accept telephone bookings, of course. Motorists, you know, and that sort of thing."

"So that there is, in fact, no clue to this man's home address?"

"He would have been recommended to us, no doubt."

"In this case, by Mr. Paul Camber?"

"I suppose so. I will look that up."

He came back, accompanied by the receptionist. She said:

"Mr. Smith booked in personally. I remember it quite well. He booked for one night, but said he might stay longer if we had the accommodation to offer him, and if he liked it here. He mentioned Mr. Camber's name and said he believed he was staying with us."

"Did he give you his full address?"

"No more than is in the register."

"Just Girvan?"

"Yes, just that he came from Girvan and was of British nationality."

"But you had some reason to suspect that Girvan was *not* where he lived?"

"Now that the question has come up, I don't know that I thought of it one way or the other. He was not a Scot, that I know."

"Thank you so much. One more question, if I may. Can you describe, any more clearly, the way he spoke?"

The receptionist shook her head as she glanced at the manager for confirmation.

"I'm very sure he was not a Scotsman," she repeated. "We get them here from all parts for the fishing and, although there are plenty of variations, a Scots accent, well, you cannot mistake it—not if you are Scottish yourself. I would not be deceived about that."

Dame Beatrice nodded slowly and rhythmically.

"But you cannot suggest where he might have come from, of course?" she said.

"It was not a tone I have ever heard before," said the girl.

"And I am not prepared to put a leading question," said Dame Beatrice.

"You think Smith was a Norfolk man, don't you?" said Laura, when they were alone.

"I think it very likely."

"That rules out—whom?"

"Mr. Maitland and the Reverend Arthur Tolley, both of whom have public-school accents."

"Couldn't they have imitated a Norfolk accent? They live in Norfolk and have a lot to do with Norfolk people."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Dame Beatrice.

"It could be that farmer—"

"Beresford?"

“Yes, but he’d hardly be likely to spend a holiday with the man who had taken *droit du seigneur* with his daughter.”

“One never knows. There are always wheels within wheels. But the identity of Mr. Smith is of academic interest only, since we are told that he caught a train at Strathpeffer *before* Paul Camber was killed.”

“Any competent detective-story writer would bust an alibi of that sort wide-open!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Love Apples

“But forbear, I say:
He dies that touches any of this fruit
Till I and my affairs are answered.”

Shakespeare

Dame Beatrice and Laura returned to the former's narrow, tall house in Kensington.

“I suppose that, by now, you know who done it, and how, and why,” said Laura, as, after dinner, they sat by the fire in the high-ceilinged, large drawing-room on the first floor.

“Well, there is certainly a good deal to go on,” Dame Beatrice equably agreed. “We have had one bit of sheer good luck, of course.”

“As I know you don't mean the salmon we took out of the Osseuch Water, I presume that you refer to the curious episode of Ethel and the stolen tomatoes. They were meant for Paul, I should think, as they were placed on the sideboard in the dining-room at Camber, but where was the point? It is clear that they contained atropine, but, even if the doctor hadn't been at hand, Ethel wouldn't exactly have died, would she? I mean, the tomatoes weren't lethal; they were merely a bit poisonous.”

“No, she wouldn't have died.”

“Yet she ate three. Paul wouldn't have eaten more than three at a time, either, would he?”

“I should not suppose so.”

“Then whoever put them there could not have expected to kill him.”

“Hardly.”

"Then I don't see any point at all in the business of the tomatoes, unless they were meant for young Stephen, who, as we know, did take some with him on his picnic. All the same, Stephen didn't die from poison. He was drowned."

"Yes, there is no possible doubt about that, and nobody looked any further and therefore the presence of the atropine was not suspected in spite of Tom Teek's evidence. But we've already agreed about that."

"Do you really think Stephen was hooked into the dyke in the way you made me demonstrate at the Falls?"

"That is what I think happened."

"And the elusive Mr. Smith did it? If that is so, couldn't one account for the death of Paul Camber in the same way?"

"Well, there are difficulties about that."

"You mean that at the dyke the murderer could await his opportunity because you can see for miles across those marshes, whereas, at the Falls, with all those rocks and things, you could never be certain that a head might not pop up from somewhere and spot what you were up to? Yes, I see that all right. And then, those summer coach-parties rolling up every other minute...Besides, there would be the question of freeing your victim from the hook. It would be one thing to do that in a slow-flowing Norfolk dyke, but quite another at the Falls of Osseuch. Think of trying to pull an inert body, weighing anything up to eleven or twelve stone, out of that raging torrent! Oh, yes, much better to await your opportunity, knock the victim on the head, and push him in quick. The only snag would be..." said Laura, working it out.

"I thought we were told that the raging torrent did not apply. The body was only partly submerged, it was in calm water and, of course, was recovered and produced at the proper time."

"And hadn't been knocked on the head?"

"I looked up the accounts in the Scottish papers before we left Edinburgh on our return journey. The body showed no injuries."

"Well, did he fall or was he pushed?" commented Laura. "Could be either. What do we do now?"

"You stay here and I go back to Camber."

She drove to Norfolk on the following day, lunched rather late in Norwich, and reached Camber Abbey at half-past three. Hugh had been notified by telephone and was awaiting her in the library. She gave him an account of her visit to Scotland and allowed him to infer that, if her enquiry was to be carried any further, an exhumation of Stephen's body might be necessary. He considered the matter and she was silent, gazing at the backs of the modern volumes of poetry, history, and detective fiction which formed the bulk of the books on the library shelves.

"Yes," said Hugh, at last. "The point is whether the stink is going to be worth the candle. If what you think is true...that the boy was poisoned so that he would be certain to drown if he fell into the dyke...that's how you see the thing, isn't it?...well, then, I suppose, as public-spirited citizens, we ought to see the thing through, however unpleasant it may be...and I do think an exhumation would be rather unpleasant."

"Yes," said Dame Beatrice, "but, on the other hand, if, thinking as we think and knowing what we know, we leave a murderer free..."

"Yes, I know; but this particular murderer isn't going to murder anybody else—unless he tries his hand on *me*!" He laughed awkwardly, and added, "What did you make of Hildegarde Salaman and her intruder?"

"I do not think he was dangerous."

"What do you think happened, then?"

"I think that Miss Salaman's visitor came into her room (not for the first time, by any means) by invitation and by way of the open window and the fire escape. Then

I think the two of them were disturbed, either by Mr. Jacob Salaman or by the unknown donor of tomatoes."

"If it was the tomato chap, Hildegarde must have seen him. He could only have disturbed her by using the fire escape to get into the house. That means she may know who he was. At any rate, she ought to be able to identify him if she sees him again."

"I might perhaps have a word with her about that. Where can I find her?"

"In front of the fire in their living-room, I expect. She hates going out, even as far as the shops. But, if Jacob's there as well, it's going to be awkward, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed it is. Would you mind very much...?"

"No, of course not. I'll send Ethel to ask her to come along here. What excuse can I make, so that Jacob suspects nothing?"

"I will go myself and bring her."

She came back with a volubly-chattering Hildegarde. Dame Beatrice, it appeared, had some unresolved difficulty with a knitting pattern. Hugh removed himself to the library and left them immersed in K.1., p.2., p.s.s.o., m.s., c.4 b., continue in st.st. (beg.k.), slip t.b.l., s.c., and so forth.

"And now," said Hildegarde, "for the real reason why I am to come here away from Jacob."

"Able thought out and admirably rendered."

"Please?"

"I hope you are going to tell me all about the man who brought the tomatoes."

"The tomatoes which injured Ethel?"

"The same. Everything in strict confidence, if you wish."

"In confidence from Jacob?"

"Certainly."

"There are no tomatoes, I think. I know nothing of those. But...I am visited in secret."

"By way of the fire escape?"

"I see that you know all about it."

"I guessed that you had a secret visitor. I do not know who it was and probably there is no need for me to know that. What I *do* want is a description of this other man... the man against whom you armed yourself with the poker."

"But I did not see any other man. The screaming and the poker were dust in the eyes of Jacob. He comes to my door at a very inconvenient moment, so I need a subterfuge."

"How *did* those poisoned tomatoes get on to Mr. Paul Camber's dining-room sideboard?"

"But how am *I* expected to know that? We were living in the lodge when—"

"So you *do* know the tomatoes were poisonous!"

The sharp, intelligent black eyes met the melting, but equally intelligent, dark-brown ones.

"The walls have had ears. I always listen," said Hildegarde. "It is not safe *not* to know what goes on." She nodded vigorously. "To you," she said, "I unburden my heart. I will tell you everything. You have promised not to tell Jacob. You see, it is Mr. Tolley."

Dame Beatrice was not often completely taken aback, but this naïve statement certainly astonished her.

"Er—*what* is Mr. Tolley?" she enquired. "You do mean the vicar of this parish, I take it?"

"Certainly. It is because of Jacob. We are not strict Jews, as you will perhaps know, and me, I love Mr. Tolley and I prepare myself to marry him."

"This is incredible, my dear Miss Salaman! Do you tell me that a gentleman in holy orders visits you in your room, and at night?"

"Oh, it is very up and up; quite, quite U, I assure you, Dame Beatrice. He knows nothing of my love. That would be most improper. He is converting me to the Church of

England, that is all. Of two evils, we choose the lesser. I say to Mr. Tolley that I am prepared to enter his church when he convinces me that it is the best for me, but I also tell him that Jacob will make an awful damn stink if he knows, and perhaps even kill me. So Mr. Tolley has the hard choice. He comes and preaches at me in secret, which is in my room at night. You see, he wishes very much to get me converted. He has argued about the time and place at first, and if he knows I have the intention to marry him later on, he will not come at all, although everything is most proper and my bed is only a studio couch and there is nothing to show that the room is where I sleep, because I take great care not to let Mr. Tolley know that I sleep in the same room where we talk. He would not like it at all. It would be a big embarrassment to him. You believe me now?"

"You have explained a good deal. Does Miss Tolley know that her brother visits you in this way?"

"That I do not know—and I do not care, either. So long as we are pure and good, what does it matter to her any more than, really, to Jacob?"

"I see. Well, may we now return to what I shall call the Night of the Tomatoes?—not that I have any proof that they came here by night."

"I am very sorry, but I cannot help you. You mean that there is nothing to show when the tomatoes were placed in the dining-room, and that it would help you to know when it was?"

"Exactly. However, perhaps the opportunist but unfortunate Ethel can tell me more about that."

"She will not care to be questioned."

"People who help themselves to other people's tomatoes must expect to be questioned." She rang the bell. "Thank you, Miss Salaman. I have undertaken to promise that your brother shall know nothing of this conversation, but I cannot help thinking—Oh, Gertrude,

will you ask Ethel to spare me a few moments when she is at liberty?—I cannot help thinking that his missionary zeal, admirable though it may be, has caused Mr. Tolley to place himself in a decidedly equivocal position. Suppose that one of his parishioners, especially one of the humbler sort, should see him climbing in at your window?”

“Oh, he does not wear his petticoats. No one would recognise him in the dark, I think.”

“Well, for his own sake it is to be hoped not.”

Hildegarde went out and almost immediately Ethel came in. She was obviously ill-at-ease and was ingenuous enough to blurt out, before Dame Beatrice could speak:

“Oh, madam, please don’t hold them tomatoes against me! I never help myself to anything before, and never will again, I promise faithful I won’t.”

“I have no intention of censuring you, Ethel. I am in quest of information. When did you first notice that the tomatoes had been placed in the dining-room? You wait at table, so you are the most reliable witness I can find. You see, the tomatoes were obviously intended to harm Mr. Paul Camber, not you.”

“You mean I took *poison*, madam?”

“There is no need to look so frightened. They would not have killed you unless you had eaten a great many more than three. Now?”

“They come over without any message, madam. On the Monday that was. But I didn’t see the master when they come because he was out, and I put them in the dish, meaning to tell him there was a present from someone, but I forget all about it and he never ask and he didn’t touch them or anything—thought they were too small, or didn’t like the deep colour, perhaps—and it seem a shame, like, to leave them there to go bad, so I take three, thinking nobody notice, there are so many, and I reckon it was a judgement on me, madam, and that’s all I can say.”

“Who brought them?”

“A little lad, madam, one of Sarah Piercey’s, it was.”

“Where does he live?”

“Number twenty the village, madam.”

“All right, Ethel, that’s all. And now you may stop worrying.”

Thankful for the words of dismissal, Ethel said that she was much obliged and added, unnecessarily, that it had all been a lesson to her, that she had been “brought up strict” and that she would never again stray from the paths of honesty and virtue. She would remember “to keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering—not that I’ve ever done that, madam, I do assure you.”

Dame Beatrice walked into the village and knocked at the door of the Piercey cottage. A woman looking, after the fashion of some mothers of large families, considerably older than she was, said she did not know whether Tom had been up to the manor house with any tomatoes. She could not think of anybody who would present Mr. Paul with tomatoes unless it might be Farmer Beresford, and that was not very likely because it was all over the village that Farmer Beresford blamed Mr. Paul because that Mr. Verith up at the Abbey had got his daughter in trouble.

“I’d like to speak to Tom,” said Dame Beatrice. “It is possible that he can tell me whether the man has any more tomatoes to sell.”

“He’ll be home from school in a few minutes, mam. Would you care to come in and set down?”

Dame Beatrice accepted this invitation and it was less than ten minutes after she had been given a chair in the parlour that his mother put her head in and announced that Tom was “round the back” and that she would send him in as soon as he had wiped his boots and given his face a lick.

Tom turned out to be an urchin of about ten with adenoids and a hoarse voice. His evidence was that Mr. Adams had handed him the basket of tomatoes and told him to take them up to the house. They were a present from a friend. As the only person Tom knew for a certainty grew tomatoes was Parson, Tom had concluded that it was Parson who had sent them, but they had actually been put into his hands by Mr. Adams—*young Mr. Adams*. Young Mr. Adams was burning rubbish down behind the shed at the time, or else Tom supposed that he would have taken them up to the house himself.

"I see. Well, when you have time, Tom, I want you to call at the vicarage..."

"Vicar don't live there no more."

"I know what you mean. Call at the cottage where the vicar and Miss Tolley live and ask whether he has tomatoes for sale. If he has, ask him to let you bring two pounds of them up to Camber Abbey and you can also ask the price. There will be sixpence for you, even if you only come and tell me that Mr. Tolley does not sell tomatoes. Understand?"

Apparently Tom did understand. He brought the message next day during his dinner-hour. Mr. Tolley did not sell his tomatoes but would be delighted to send Camber Abbey a consignment when they were in season. He had no hot-house and so could only produce his tomatoes when they chose to ripen in the open air, and it was still too early in the year for that to be possible.

"I suppose Tolley *is* above suspicion?" said Hugh gloomily, when Dame Beatrice had returned to Camber Abbey. "He doesn't want Catherine to marry me, you know, although he's managed to swallow his first bitterness about it."

"If my present surmise is correct, Mr. Tolley is not the only jealous and bitter person in this village. What is more, this person knows something about Stephen

Camber's death but doesn't intend to come out into the open."

"But the question must be...why were the tomatoes sent at all," said Hugh, "if they weren't lethal."

Dame Beatrice did not answer. Then she demanded, with some suddenness, "Do *you* grow tomatoes, Mr. Camber?"

"No. I've never had the opportunity," said Hugh, returning her gaze with one of astonishment. "A man I knew at the Ministry did, though. He was very keen. Nothing he didn't know about them."

"I should be most interested to meet him. Can you put me in touch with him?"

"Why, certainly. How soon do you want to meet him?"

"The sooner the better."

"I'll get him on the telephone." He glanced at the clock. "Yes, I'll get him now. Perhaps—I mean, do you want to meet him personally, or can you talk over the telephone if I contact him?"

"It will have to be face to face, I'm afraid. The time and place of meeting will be, of course, at his convenience."

The meeting was arranged for Tuesday in the following week, and Dame Beatrice spent the intervening days at her Kensington home catching up on some of her clinical work, and acting as unpaid and devoted baby-sitter for her secretary, whose husband had allotted himself a week's leave. The man who grew tomatoes with so much enthusiasm lived in Middlesex where he and his wife occupied a small bungalow with a large garden. There was a lawn surrounded by flower-beds immediately behind the bungalow, then came two trellis-work screens with rambler roses trained on them and a narrow gap between them through which ran a path of crazy paving.

The tomato-grower led the way to an impressively large greenhouse and gestured at its inmates.

“Of course, there’s nothing to interest you at present, Dame Beatrice,” he said. “Just the young plants, as you see. No flowers, no fruit. Of course, if I had some heating in here the things would get on faster, but I always think of tomatoes as being too hardy to be treated as hot-house plants.”

“As a matter of fact, I do not need to see fruit or flowers, Mr. Brown, and, apart from admiring yours as very healthy and promising specimens of the *genus*, I do not really need to see the plants. What I am after is a little botanical information which I hope you can supply. What would you say if I told you that there is a tomato-grower, either amateur or professional—I am inclined to think the latter, although I have nothing to go on—who is grafting tomato plants on to the deadly nightshade and distributing the resultant fruits to certain carefully-chosen acquaintances?”

“What should I say? Good heavens, Dame Beatrice, you’re not serious!”

“Perfectly serious. Do you happen to know whether it could be done?”

“Well, tomatoes and deadly nightshade and, I believe, potatoes, belong to the same family, of course. But what would be the object of such grafting?”

“Murder would be the result, if not the object.”

“Oh, but deadly nightshade by itself would hardly kill any but a young child. A graft on to it from a harmless tomato plant would cause it to become weaker still, surely, so far as its poisonous fruits would be concerned.”

“That is what I should suppose. Mr. Brown, will you make the experiment?”

“No, madam, I fear not. I would do much to assist your researches but my training as a Civil Servant militates against my placing myself in the equivocal position of issuing a poisonous tomato. Besides, apart from all other scruples, I love my tomato plants and could

no more bear to tamper with them than I could bear to vivisect my pet monkey, if I had one."

Dame Beatrice wagged her head in solemn agreement.

"I do see what you mean," she said. "At any rate, you do not dismiss my fantastic theory as mere moonshine."

"I should hesitate to dismiss any theory of yours as moonshine, Dame Beatrice, although this one, I am bound to admit, does sound a little far-fetched. You'll stay for tea, won't you? My wife has made a special baking and is longing to have a talk with you over the cup that cheers."

Dame Beatrice did not use (apparently) any means of persuasion, but, by the time she left, the Browns had agreed to make the experiment of coupling the poisonous deadly nightshade with the innocuous tomato and to apprise her of the time of the hybrid fruiting.

"What we shall do, I expect," said Brown, "is to graft a scion of the tomato on to the stock of the deadly nightshade, making a transverse cut on each so that scion fits on to stock and the two can be bound together. A possible alternative would be to cut a long narrow V-shaped wedge in the scion and fit it into a V-shaped depression cut in the stock. We might try both methods, Dame Beatrice."

"However successful you are with one or both, the results will not be lethal, even to a small child," said Dame Beatrice. "All that my suspect needed was to produce the symptoms of alcoholic excess in his victim."

"Diabolical!"

"In this case, I am not quite sure about that."

She thanked the Browns and returned to Camber.

"Any luck?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, yes. Mr. Brown is quite prepared to make an experiment in the interests of science."

"In the interests of detection, you mean?"

"In the interests of the science of detection."

"What is the story behind the poisoned tomatoes?"

"I think I know. It stems from two facts: one, that Paul Camber was a rabid abstainer from alcohol in any shape or form; two, that more people than Verith and Farmer Beresford disliked him."

"That wouldn't surprise me. The poisoned tomatoes, therefore, were intended for Paul's consumption."

"With the rider that it would not trouble the donor—or should I say the grower—if young Stephen ate some of them, too. What I am perfectly certain the person concerned did not foresee nor intend was to occasion the death of Stephen because he had eaten the tomatoes. I have said all this before."

"Any use asking you to explain?"

"I do not propose to explain at present; I may be totally wrong."

"I bet you're not! Incidentally, did you get any sense out of Hildegarde?" asked Hugh. "About that night, I mean."

"I think—no, I was told—of a visitor who creates the necessity for Hildegarde to occupy a room from which the fire-escape is available."

"Good Lord! I'd never have thought of such a thing! But why the necessity for secrecy? I mean, if she wants to bring a man in, why the devil shouldn't she? I should have no objection!"

"*You* might not, but brother Jacob might have other ideas."

"Oh, but Hildegarde rides rough-shod over Jacob."

"Does she? I hardly think so. I have not had much opportunity of seeing them together, it is true, but, to my mind, it is a case of Tom and Maggie Tulliver, the male being, in the end, the tougher character of the two."

"Really? This is rather interesting."

"Oh, I don't know. You get the Salaman situation in more than one of the old ballads, and *they* show a

considerable knowledge of human follies, frailties, and inversions, do they not?"

"I can't think what you mean."

"What about 'the Cruel Brother'? Did he not stab his sister, and that on her wedding day?"

"You don't mean Jacob is *jealous* where Hildegarde is concerned?"

"I am sorry for both of them if he is." She changed the subject without mentioning the name of Hildegarde's nocturnal visitor, and began to talk with animation of the Broads, their fauna and flora, and of the scheme for making them a National Park.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Apples of Discord

"Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings."

Milton

Dame Beatrice took thought for the next two days before deciding upon a course of action. To the surprise of Hugh, she removed herself to the small inn at which George was already putting up, explaining that as she knew she was going to brood instead of to detect, she thought it unethical to trespass upon his hospitality while she was ignoring his interests.

"What do you propose to brood upon?" he enquired, amused rather than offended by her defection.

"The Reverend Arthur Tolley," she replied. "I suppose he has a greenhouse, even if he hasn't a hot-house?"

"I have no idea. He may have one at the back of his cottage manse. There certainly is not one in that long front garden. You are still thinking in terms of tomatoes, I take it?"

"Yes, I am, but there are other matters, quite (I hope and trust) unconnected with tomatoes which, all the same, must claim attention."

"Well, you know your own business best. Am I to hope that you will return to my house when you have brooded?"

"I am most grateful for the invitation. What do you think of the mentality of the Reverend Arthur Tolley?"

"Not much," said Hugh. "He's the type to stick his neck out in the pursuit of his calling. That's all right if the right person does it, but Arthur Tolley, in my opinion, is of

the stuff of which silly asses, not martyrs, are made. I've heard of lots of crazy things he's done. He even offered marriage to the Beresford girl, so I was told, to give the baby a name. Beresford told him to take his adjectival charity elsewhere and set the dog on him, and young Tom Adams, my gardener, uttered dark threats in the pub."

Dame Beatrice nodded.

"Really?" she said; but it was not so much a question as an indication that she was not in the least surprised.

"Why, what's he been up to now?" asked Hugh.

"Tolley, I mean."

"Looking for converts."

"Good heavens! He can save himself the trouble where Jacob Salaman is concerned. Jacob pays lip-service only to his Jewish faith, but he certainly wouldn't change it for anything else. Some parsons are shockingly obtuse."

"Obtuse is the word," Dame Beatrice agreed, thinking not of religion but of Hildegarde's matrimonial plans for the Reverend Arthur. "Would you call him easily led?"

"Only by his own nose. I should call him rather a pigheaded type. When, if ever, do I hear the result of your brooding?"

"I shall certainly keep you informed, but there may need to be a considerable time-lag."

She remained for two days at the inn, decided not to tackle her immediate problem until she had given it still more thought, and, on the third day, without a word to Hugh, she and George returned to London and she telephoned for company to come to dinner and attend a conference.

"So now," she said to Laura Gavin and her husband Robert, a detective chief-inspector of the C.I.D., "we have to find the man who grows these tomatoes. He cannot live far from Camber village. In fact, he may live in the village itself. How do you suggest we begin?"

"It won't be easy," said Laura. "He won't exactly advertise. It looks to me more like a snooping police-job than anything we can tackle by ourselves."

"Thank you for the adjective," said her husband. "In my submission, there is no case for the police to take on unless Dame Beatrice can find evidence that the murderer did, as she suggests, actually hook the victim into the river, knowing that he would be too stupefied by the poison to be able to save himself. And *that* is going to take a mighty lot of proving."

Dame Beatrice concurred in this view but offered no comment on it.

"Well," said Laura, "what is the plan of campaign? In other words, what are we actually going to *do*?"

"*We* are going to enquire into a matter of motive, and *you* are going to visit Somerset House. Then I shall return to Norfolk and put up in the City of Norwich."

"Rather a long way from Camber. I should have thought we'd need to be on the spot to keep an eye on things," protested Laura.

"What I have to keep an eye on, at present," said Dame Beatrice, "are the hotel registers of that ancient and beautiful city."

"More cagey work by the mysterious Mr. Verith?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Goodness knows how many hotel visitors there must be in a place the size of Norwich! Dozens, I should imagine. In a commercial city the hotel clientèle are here today and gone tomorrow."

"Yes, but, you see, short of putting an advertisement in the newspapers, which I am not anxious to do in case it should come under the observation of the wrong persons, there seems to be nothing else for it but to check the hotel registers."

"I suppose you mean you don't want Hugh Camber to know. But hotels won't give away their clients' affairs to

casual and enquiring strangers. It was pretty sticky in Scotland, if you remember. How do you propose to work the oracle?"

"With the connivance of the chief constable, child. I happen to know him quite well. He will supply me with a letter of introduction and a valid, although slightly exaggerated, reason for my enquiries. What, dear Robert, do you say to that?"

"What should we do in this life without useful contacts?" said Detective Chief-Inspector Gavin with an impudent grin. "And what, if any, is my part in all this?"

Instead of answering, Dame Beatrice described the situation obtaining at Camber between Arthur Tolley and the lively, unscrupulous Hildegarde Salaman and asked him what he would do about it.

"Good Lord!" said Gavin. He began to laugh.

"Stop it!" said Laura. "He's the most frightful ass, but it wouldn't do him any good with his bishop if it all came out. Who on earth would believe that his motives are what Hildegarde Salaman says they are?"

"His bishop, most probably, if he knows the chap," said Gavin. "I think it's a howlingly funny situation, all the same."

"Well, what's Mrs. Croc, going to do about it?—although why she should ask *your* advice I don't know," said Laura.

"Dame B., with her usual graceful tact and exquisite sense of timing, will enquire of this fat-headed cleric what the hell he thinks he's playing at, I should imagine," said her husband.

"It might be the best plan," Dame Beatrice agreed. Laura glanced sharply at her. She realised that her employer's thoughts were elsewhere.

"Something clicked about the tomatoes?" she asked hopefully.

"A glimmering, as of will o' the wisp—a flicker against the surrounding gloom, child. Even to me, attuned as I am to your own fantastic imaginings, it seems too far-fetched to be feasible, and yet..."

"I thought you'd get on to something if you brooded long enough," said Laura. "I do myself. Nothing like the subconscious mind for turning up the silver hoard of knowledge with the ploughshare of long and wide experience."

"*You'd* better have a cup of tea and some aspirin," said her husband. "Tell us what you've hit on, Dame B."

"Only that, if you want coal, Newcastle might be a likely place to find some."

"Carrying coals to Newcastle," said Laura, screwing up her face. "That ought to ring a bell, but it doesn't. When do you want me to go to Somerset House, and what am I to do when I get there?"

"Find Paul Camber's will and make a digest of its main provisions."

Laura came back to the Kensington house next day hungry, tired, and disgruntled.

"There ain't no cause to suspect Paul Camber's will," she announced. "Hugh Camber has succeeded to the estate with the utmost legality. You'd better ask him how he managed it."

"There is no need for that. I am not in the least surprised that there is a valid will. From what I know of him, I cannot imagine Hugh Camber consenting to inherit the property by default, as it were, and because, apart from Mrs. Hal Camber's little son, he is the only Camber left alive—unless"—she paused for a moment and then resumed—"unless there is a nearer and more obvious heir to the estates than Hugh."

"Not the Beresford baby?"

"It is an avenue which will need to be explored, child."

“But I thought you told me Farmer Beresford’s whole grievance was that the baby was b.w.s.o.b. Wasn’t that so?”

“Well, that is what—if I translate your abbreviations correctly—Hugh Camber was given to understand, but it *might* not be true. If it was not, then the whole problem of young Stephen Camber’s death needs thinking out again.”

“I haven’t yet thought it out the first time. When do you go to Norfolk?”

“The day after tomorrow. I shall not need your help at present. You had better take Hamish to Bournemouth. He loves the seaside and all seasons of the year appear to be alike to him. I have never known such a healthy, contented child.”

“If by a healthy, contented child you mean a fiend in human guise, you’re about right! Very well, then. I’ll send you a telegram when I know where we’re staying. Where can I find you in Norwich?”

“At the *Ket and Colman* hotel, child. I will wire you if I move from there.”

Dame Beatrice did not move from the *Ket and Colman*. She conducted the next part of her enquiry from there. It made a good base and a secret one. It seemed to her, at this point in the enquiry, that the number of suspects must certainly include two—that is, if Mrs. Hal Camber and Hugh himself could be eliminated. The two were Farmer Beresford, to whose interest it would undoubtedly be to have his daughter’s baby son recognised as the Camber heir (supposing that Paul had fathered the child and married the mother), and Paul Camber himself, whose motive might be more obscure than Beresford’s but to whose dining-room sideboard the poisoned tomatoes could be traced.

She tackled the obvious first, through her chauffeur George, who had driven her to Norwich and was there

with the car.

"I want you," she said, "to repair again to the village inn at Camber and contact the Adams, both father and son."

"I know them well, madam. During my stay I was enabled to form some useful friendships and Mr. Adams senior is a man of parts, as is his son, young Mr. Adams. I learned more about sniggling eels from them than I had dreamt of in my philosophy."

"Good. Do you think you could introduce tomatoes into the conversation?"

"Readily, madam. The Adams are fanatical gardeners and should respond readily to such a subject."

"What I want to know is whether their late employer, Mr. Paul Camber, was interested in tomatoes and whether—but this is where you will need to be very circumspect and careful—whether he ever experimented with the growing of them. Do not, on any account, risk asking a leading question. They are not to know that they are being pumped."

"I shall take pleasure in seeing that they don't, madam. Would there be anything more?"

"Not unless you can get hold of some gossip about the girl Beresford and her baby. I would rather like to know whether the village is cognisant of the fact that Paul Camber married her."

"Very good, madam, but, again ...?"

"Again, great discretion, George. At present I would rather be without the information than have anybody suspect that I was seeking it."

"I understand, madam. I will report to you tomorrow morning."

"Right. You can take the car, George. I shan't need it. And stay the night at Camber if they can put you up at the inn."

"There will be no difficulty about that, madam."

He made his report at half-past ten on the following morning. It was interesting, but it was very much what Dame Beatrice had expected.

“Old Adams knew nothing helpful, but, on his own, Tom told me. Mr. Paul Camber had a special tomato plant, madam, of which, it appears, he was proud. He’d made a grafting and took a great interest in the result. It seems that for two years he was unsuccessful, but the third year—the summer of his own and his son’s death—he obtained the result he had hoped for. That was all I was able to gain, madam, short of asking leading questions, which you desired me not to do.”

“Thank you, George. That from young Tom? My next move seems to be to contact the housekeeper, Mrs. Brunton, and that is an interview which I had better conduct in person. Fortunately, I need not apply to Mr. Camber for her address, as I have it already. In any case, I cannot spare the time to see her just yet. My researches are not completed.”

Searching the hotel registers was proving a lengthy business. It took her the whole of the following week, armed with a list of hotels, boarding-houses, and lodgings supplied by the City of Norwich police, to track down the entry she sought. She made a copy of it and, armed with this, went off to see Mrs. Brunton.

Mrs. Brunton was not anxious to talk to the bright-eyed, beaky-mouthed, reptilian visitor. She had left Camber Abbey months before, she asserted, and had no further interest in its concerns.

“But you have an excellent memory,” said Dame Beatrice, coaxingly. “I wish you would tell me why Mr. Paul Camber went to live in Norwich for a month before he went to Scotland.”

“Why? How should I know, madam? It was not Mr. Paul’s habit to confide in me. He went, right enough, and then, after Master Stephen’s death he went to see his

lawyers and then straight up to Scotland so soon as he had been back to Camber to collect his fishing things. I knew he went away, but I don't know why he went to Norwich. That wasn't my business and I hope I know my place."

"Oh, come, now, Mrs. Brunton! Surely you had an address to which to send letters?"

"I had nothing, madam. Mr. Paul told me he should travel and so it wouldn't be any good sending anything on. I was to keep it all until he got back."

"I see." She did not attempt to press the point, as she already had the information she needed. Instead, she shifted her ground and was interested to notice how the housekeeper's guard came up again immediately. She knew nothing about greenhouses and hot-houses, she averred, and did not want to know anything about them. Her work had lain inside Camber Abbey, not in the kitchen garden.

Dame Beatrice tried shock tactics.

"You do realise, Mrs. Brunton, don't you, that Stephen Camber was murdered?"

The question shook Mrs. Brunton less than she had expected.

"I hardly think so, though, all the same, I wouldn't be surprised, madam, but it happened months ago, and Mr. Paul's dead, too. Nothing can be done about it now."

"What was the attitude of father to son? Did they get on well together?"

"It was all right until Mr. Verith came."

"Ah, yes, the tutor. What went wrong when he came, then? Was Mr. Camber jealous of his influence over the boy? I understand that Stephen was very much attached to Mr. Verith."

"Yes, that's right enough, he was. They used to go everywhere together. It seemed as if Master Stephen couldn't bear Mr. Verith out of his sight."

"A kind of hero-worship, would you say?"

"Well, madam, Mr. Verith gave Master Stephen an interest in life, as it were. All the things his father had thought too much for him, such as learning to swim and being able to take jumps on his pony instead of just walking it over the meadows, and learning judo, or whatever they call it, and taking longer walks and going fishing, Mr. Verith taught him and encouraged him to do."

"And what kind of influence do you think he had over the boy, Mrs. Brunton? You were fond of Stephen. How did all the tutor's innovations and Stephen's obvious hero-worship strike you?"

"Well," said the housekeeper thoughtfully, her serene old face smooth and unwrinkled as a well-stored apple, "as to that, there might be two opinions. I can't say I thought Mr. Verith's influence was bad in itself, but there's no doubt it made Master Stephen wilful."

"Wilful?"

"Yes, madam, or so I thought. Before Mr. Verith came he was what I should call a meek, obedient, biddable kind of boy, but he turned rather different. I once heard him call his father a fool."

"Really? That does seem rather a strong term for a boy of his type and age to have used."

"Another time he said he should go fishing in the rain if he wanted to. He said he was sick of being treated as if he was made of icing sugar."

"I see. Yes, it does seem to have produced a metamorphosis, this companionship with Mr. Verith. Did you ever hear Mr. Camber reproach the tutor for the change in the boy's attitude?"

"There was no trouble, so far as I know, madam, until the dreadful upset with the Beresfords. *That* ended in Mr. Verith being given his notice, as I expect you've heard."

"We are inclined to think, Mrs. Brunton, that the Beresford baby is really a Camber; that Mr. Paul Camber

married the young mother before the child was born and almost immediately after Stephen's death."

"Yet he willed the property to Mr. Hugh, madam. He told me he was going to. That was when we came home from Master Stephen's funeral. Very white, he was, and very grim, and he called me into the library and said as how he was going to make Mr. Hugh his heir. 'My boy's gone,' he said, 'and there's to be no nonsense of how the property's to be disposed of,' he said. 'It's not entailed; I can leave it where I like,' he said, 'and Hugh's to have it and I shall want you and Bembridge'—that's the agent, you know, madam—as witnesses. I'll get Samuels—that's the lawyer, madam—'on to it at once,' he says. And so he did, and had it all tied up to Mr. Hugh as tight as ever Samuels could tie it, and Mr. Bembridge and I were the witnesses."

"Very curious and very interesting. So the Beresford baby and his mother got nothing at all?"

"Not a halfpenny in money and not a rod, pole, or perch of the estate, madam. But it wouldn't surprise me if, one of these fine days, they didn't have a try to make a claim, if, as you say, that baby was born in lawful wedlock—not that I ever heard of it. We all thought it belonged to be Verith's."

"I gather that Stephen Camber was heart-broken when Mr. Verith was dismissed?"

"That he was, madam, poor little soul. Didn't seem to know what to do with himself. Used to be out all day on his own. His father was worried to death about him, but he didn't know what to do. He thought he'd get over it better if he was left alone. Anyway, the boy wouldn't have his father at any price. He and Mr. Paul and the tutor used to have evening dinner together—Master Stephen had been allowed to stay up to dinner after his fourteenth birthday—but once Mr. Verith had gone, he used to take all his meals in my room. I spoke to Mr. Paul about it and

asked what I should do, and Mr. Paul told me to put up with him, if I didn't mind, until he got over his tantrums. But it wasn't tantrums, madam, it was real, right-down, sick grief. I didn't see him getting over it in a hurry. Those quiet ones brood and brood until something goes all bad inside them—and then it happens."

"What happens, Mrs. Brunton?"

"Suicide, madam."

The two elderly women stared at one another.

"But that suggestion puts a new complexion on the whole thing," said Dame Beatrice. "Do you really think...?"

"I never took to the idea of an accident, madam, any more than I believed that poor little Master Stephen was drunk at the time."

"He was not drunk; he had taken poison."

"Poison? What poison? There wasn't nothing but Ethel's aspirins in the house, and well I know they never left her top short drawer in her chest of drawers, madam."

"What about Ethel's tomato-sickness? That seems to have occasioned a certain amount of excitement."

"Ethel was drunk, madam, I am very sorry to say. Her one lapse, so far as *I'm* aware, but that time she slipped and fell. I was very ashamed of Ethel—and then to tell all those lies about she'd never touched a drop! 'Really, Ethel,' I said, when at last she'd come to herself, 'you might get away with murder,' I said, 'but you cannot get away with acting like somebody that don't know her own capacity. If you *must* drink, drink like the gentry. It's a disgrace, that's what it is,' I said, 'and I shouldn't think you'd ever live it down. It's a good thing Mr. Camber will never know,' I said, 'his principles being what they are, or you'd be out on the front gravel drive, with boxes beside you, this very minute,' I said."

"And how did Ethel take these remarks?"

“She sobbed and swore, madam. *Not* a nice exhibition. I left her, in the end. It was not my place to dismiss her, but she was not in a fit state of mind to heed anybody’s strictures just then. After that, I thought better to leave well alone, but she brought up the subject again, about a week later.”

“Oh, did she? Smarting under a sense of injustice, no doubt.”

“It did seem like that. ‘It was the tomatoes, Mrs. Brunton,’ she said. ‘Doctor told me so. And I’ve put all the nasty things on the bumby-heap, yes, and I’ve *danced* on them,’ she says. I told her not to be a silly girl, but to let bygones be bygones.”

“But she was not prepared to accept that as the last word on the subject.”

“I don’t know how you know, madam, but such is the case. ‘You’re doing me an injustice, Mrs. Brunton,’ she said, ‘a grave injustice,’ she said. ‘As God’s my judge,’ she said—not that I like to hear a young woman breaking the Commandments like taking His name in vain, which it seemed to me she was doing, but, anyway, she said it. ‘As God’s my judge,’ she said, ‘it was the tomatoes, not the drink, and Doctor knows it.’”

“She was right,” said Dame Beatrice flatly. The next move was to interview young Mrs. Beresford-Camber and to find the fisherman who had been upon the river’s brim before Stephen was drowned.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Marriage Lines

"I did not speak one word to her, as she came unasked."

* * *

"As there was no moon to come home by, it was very disagreeable to come home thro' the Wood..."

Parson Woodforde's Diary

There was no welcome for Dame Beatrice at Beresford's farm. She had timed her arrival for five o'clock, hoping to find the farmer and his family at home for tea. The door was opened by the daughter, who stared belligerently at the visitor.

"Yes?" she said.

"Who is it, Nessie?" called out Mrs. Beresford from the kitchen.

"You'd better come in," said the girl. "We're just going to have our tea."

"Please do not interrupt it."

"Who *is* it, Nessie?"

"I forget the name," said the girl, in an undertone. Dame Beatrice gave it. "Oh, yes, of course. It's Dame Beatrice from the Abbey, Mother!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! And I'm in my overall! Ask Dame Beatrice into the parlour and take her a cup of tea. I can't come for a minute. I'm cooking."

As the scent of grilled bloaters was in the air, the last statement was redundant. Dame Beatrice was shown into the parlour and given an armchair. Then the girl disappeared and the self-invited guest could hear the acrimonious conversation which ensued.

"I'm not taking her any tea. Didn't ask her to come, did we?"

"I'm not having people at meal-times and give them nothing. That's not the way I was brought up, and it's not the way you've been brought up, either. You do as I say, and take along that cup of tea and some cake, now."

"I don't see why I should wait on the snooping old...!"

"All right, then. You'd better see to your father's bloaters, and I'll go myself. Though how, after what you've done, you dare to set yourself up, I don't really know. No pride at all, you girls nowadays!"

"I'm married, aren't I?"

"You weren't married when it happened. There's your father! *Now* will you do as you're asked?"

Dame Beatrice accepted the tea, refused the cake (both with a polite leer), and said that she would be very glad of a word with Mrs. Camber when the latter was at liberty.

"Oh," said the girl, turning at the door, "so you know Paul married me? That's something!"

She shut the door behind her with a slight but unmistakable slam and was away some twenty-five minutes. During that time Dame Beatrice sipped tea and was aware of a booming male voice whose actual words were indistinguishable but which appeared to hold the floor for some considerable time. When the girl came back to the parlour, she was flushed and looked even more resentful than before. She flung herself into an armchair opposite Dame Beatrice and raised her eyebrows.

"I am still investigating the deaths of Mr. Paul Camber and his son Stephen," said Dame Beatrice. "There is one small point over which you can help me, if you will."

"And if I won't?"

"I have no doubt that there are people in the village who would be only too ready to tell me what I want to know."

"Well, what *is* it you want to know?"

"I want to know whether there was ever any sort of understanding between you and Tom Adams."

"What? Me look at a jobbing gardener when I could, and did, get his master?"

"Tom Adams is not a jobbing gardener. Did you give Tom any reason to think that you might marry him?"

"No!"

"Not even when he gave you peaches, apricots, and nectarines from Paul Camber's fruit trees?—as I am quite sure he did."

"No! I never encouraged Tom Adams!"

"I have evidence to the contrary."

"What evidence?"

"Since you decline to help me, that is *my* affair."

"If you know all about it, why have you come here?"

"It is preferable, I always think, to keep discreditable facts from reaching too many ears. Come, now. You *did* have an understanding with Tom."

"Suppose I did? A girl can change her mind, can't she?"

"Certainly, but it can be extremely disconcerting for her, and can cause her some sleepless nights if she has reason to believe that her change of mind has led to murder being committed."

The girl went white.

"It wasn't my fault! How was I to know what Tom would do?" she said.

"You could not know. I am not sure that you know now."

"How do you mean?"

"You *have* had some sleepless nights, then?"

"Of course I have! Tom made some very wild threats and I felt sure he'd had it out on Stephen Camber."

"What caused him to utter threats? Not your marriage to Paul Camber?"

"He knew nothing about that! I didn't think anybody did except my mother and father, and now you. How did you guess?"

"It was not altogether a guess. It was a matter of logical deduction worked out from various small scraps of information which I have picked up and put together and which I have now been able to prove. I asked you what caused Tom Adams to utter threats. Whom did he threaten?"

"Paul."

"But why, if he knew nothing of the marriage?"

"He thought Paul was the father of my baby."

"As, of course, he was."

"Yes, he was, and then, when I knew, I said he'd got to marry me, or else I'd put it all over the village that it was him, and not that Verith who got me into trouble."

"You blackmailed Paul Camber into marrying you?"

"Blackmail had nothing to do with it! How dare you use that word about a respectable married girl?"

"Would Paul Camber have married you if you had not threatened him with exposure?"

"I've no reason to think he would not."

"Then why did you need to threaten him?"

"My father made me do it. I'm afraid of my father. He's violent."

"Is your baby *really* a Camber?"

"Yes, he is, and he ought to have his rights, and he shall, if I have to swing for it! So now you know! You can tell Mr. Hugh Upstart Camber that if he's sensible he'll take himself off and leave Camber Abbey to me and my son."

"I will certainly give him your message. Incidentally, why did not Paul leave the estate to your baby?"

The girl, who had been seated upright with her fingers closely entwined, flung her hands apart and got up.

"Get out! Get out!" she screamed. "You old witch! You old witch! Get out!"

There was a rush of footsteps from the kitchen. In came Beresford, preceded by his lighter-footed wife, who slipped past him, flew to her daughter, and gripped her by the arm.

"Stop it! Stop it!" she said, giving the arm an authoritative shake. The father remained just inside the doorway, his jaws still champing on a crust of bread.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded. Suddenly there was a dramatic climax to the scene. Young Mrs. Camber wrenched her arm from her mother's grasp, gave a cry, and, without warning, fell down unconscious. She went rigid and her face became convulsed. Her mother pulled a long piece of hard wood from her overall pocket and thrust it between the girl's teeth.

"You'd better go. We know what to do," she said. "She got herself worked up. It never does her fits much good, that doesn't."

"I am extremely sorry," said Dame Beatrice. She meant it, so far as young Mrs. Camber's epilepsy was concerned, but there was little doubt that the disability itself proved to be one of the few missing links in the chain of evidence which was leading to the discovery of the murderer.

She mentioned this to Hugh, for she went straight back to Camber from the Beresford farm.

"Heredity, of course," said Hugh. "Paul wouldn't risk leaving the place to the child of an epileptic. He had a great regard for the estate, I believe, and epilepsy is a heritable illness. Wonder how soon he found out that the girl *was* an epileptic?"

"Quite probably on the wedding-day. Any emotional disturbance is enough to touch off a case of grand mal."

"And that would about finish Paul. He hadn't much of the milk of human kindness in his nature, particularly if

his *amour propre* was involved. I really wonder he agreed to marry the girl. Of course, he may not have known about the epilepsy then."

"He did know that she proposed to let the village into the secret that Paul was the father of her child."

"He wouldn't have faced the scandal."

"So she seems to have realised. What her feelings were when she discovered that, on Paul's death, you were the heir, one can only imagine."

"Of course, there was always Mrs. Hal Camber, with her eye, if one may put it that way, on the inheritance for her son."

"I thought we'd got rid of Héloïse."

"I wonder? Mothers of sons can be strangely persistent when the interests of the offspring are at stake."

"How much help do you think you got from your visit?"

"Nothing but the evidence that the girl is an epileptic, coupled with a strong presumption that she blackmailed Paul Camber into marrying her. I already knew that she was furiously angry about Paul Camber's will and that she was trying to work out some means of upsetting it. Have you made your own will, may I ask?"

"No. There is time enough for that when I am married."

"Have you fixed a date for the wedding?"

"No. As a matter of fact, Catherine is still pretty sore about our questioning Maitland and Tunstall. To tell you the truth, we're not really on speaking terms at the moment."

"I am truly sorry to hear that," said Dame Beatrice, with a crocodile leer which seemed to belie her words. "All the same, I must confess that I had some such eventuality in mind when I decided to interview the suitors."

"Oh, but, look here..."

Dame Beatrice waved a yellow claw.

"Be of good cheer," she advised him. "Like Bottom of the Fairies, I have a plan to make all right. It is essential, though, that, at present, you and Miss Tolley should appear to be estranged."

"Appear to be? We are!"

"It is but a passing phase in your relationship, I feel sure. And now I will let you into a little secret. I have instructed George, my chauffeur, to allow a rumour to circulate in the village public house that the engagement has been completely broken off. He will offer to lay bets that you will remain a bachelor."

Hugh stared at her, speechless, for a moment. Then he said, contriving a smile:

"I suppose there *is* method in your madness?"

"If Miss Tolley's life were in danger you would have no hesitation in practising a little deception in order to ensure her safety, would you?"

"Of course not. I'd deal in lies, damned lies and statistics! But what dangers *could* threaten Catherine?"

"As the vicar's sister, none. As your prospective wife, which is, by interpretation, as the mother of your child—but I've said this before—by implication if not in so many words."

"Oh, I see. Your theory still is that we are safe as long as we don't marry. You know, Dame Beatrice, I'm not sure that my best plan wouldn't be to sell the Camber estates lock, stock, and barrel, and clear right out. Then Catherine and I could marry and there would be an end to this beastly business."

"An excellent plan. I have often thought of suggesting it to you and if I were not absolutely certain that I shall catch the murderer of Stephen Camber, and that comparatively soon, I might urge such a course, except —"

“Except, I hope, that you don’t see me as the type who clears out because of a little unpleasantness. Apart from that, I don’t see who would buy Camber Abbey. People don’t buy these big properties nowadays.”

“A school?”

Hugh laughed.

“Strange as it may sound,” he said, “I strongly dislike to think of the place overrun by noisy great clods of boys and my library being turned into the headmaster’s study, and all this”—he waved towards the windows beyond which lay the lake with its coots and mallard, its secretive, awful pike, and the reeds and the sedge showing green—“turned into playing fields and an open-air swimming pool.”

“‘The Tomb of His Ancestors,’” said Dame Beatrice, with a startling hoot of laughter.

“And none the worse for that,” retorted Hugh. “It is quite a mistake to think that all Civil Servants are without human feelings and failings. Pepys was a Civil Servant, don’t forget.”

“Touché!” said Dame Beatrice, again producing her eldritch cackle. “Well, I will leave you.”

She went up to her room, presumably to dress for dinner, but, having put on her dark fur coat and matching toque so that she did not, in Laura Gavin’s partly-idiomatic expression, “stand out against the sky-line,” she slipped downstairs by way of the servants’ staircase at the far end of the long gallery and left the house with a secrecy which went unmarked except by Ethel, who had conceived a strange, protective affection for her elderly inquisitor.

“And I’ll not give you away,” muttered Ethel, “seeing you be about your lawful occasions.”

“And what are you muttering about? Saying your prayers?” demanded a housemaid, who, more intelligent

than Ethel, grudged that lover of tomatoes her superior position in the household.

"P'raps," said Ethel, "and p'raps not. And I'm told the dining-room was a disgrace this morning. I must ask you to be more partic'lar, even if you *are* only second."

The second housemaid tossed her head and the subject of the duties of housemaids and the desirability of parlourmaids minding their own business became the topics of conversation.

Dame Beatrice went to the cottage occupied by the vicar and his sister. She admired the long front garden but did not stop to inspect the results of the vicar's labours. Her sharp knock on the door brought Catherine to open it.

"Good!" said Dame Beatrice. "Just the person I wanted to see."

"Have you come from Camber Abbey?"

"Of course, dear child."

"Then I ought to tell you that it's no use."

"What isn't?"

"Hugh sending me an olive branch."

"I have been called many things in my time," said Dame Beatrice, thoughtfully, "but never, I think, an olive branch. Apart from that, Hugh did not send me. He does not even know that I have come."

"Oh," said Catherine briskly. "Well, perhaps you'd care to come in."

Inside the cottage and given a rocking-chair by the hearth, Dame Beatrice embarked on an explanation of her presence.

"I am very glad your brother is not in," she said, by way of preamble, "as I very much wanted to see you alone."

"He's gone to Norwich to see the bishop. He's worried about something, I think, and wants some advice. The bishop is a very understanding man."

"Have you any idea of the nature of your brother's problem?"

"None whatever. I just know that he's worried."

"About Miss Hildegarde Salaman?"

"How did you guess?"

"I thought you did not know the nature of his problem."

"Oh, I know it has to do with Hildegarde, that's all."

"I see."

"But you did not come about that."

"It was not my main reason for coming, certainly, and, since the Reverend Arthur Tolley has decided to rely upon the advice of his bishop, it ceases to be my reason at all. Miss Tolley, I must put a question to you—hypothetical, I hope, but a question which needs a considered answer. Have you ever thought that Hugh Camber's life might be in danger if he married you?"

"Oh, there was all that nonsense about poor little Mrs. Hal Camber, of course, but she wouldn't hurt a fly. She's just a silly woman with one chick."

"I am not thinking of Mrs. Hal Camber. What do you know about Farmer Beresford's daughter?"

"Nothing much. They don't come to church, as you know. She's a pretty but rather disagreeable girl, I should say."

"Did you know that she is an epileptic?"

"Vaguely, I think. I haven't taken much interest in that family. They refuse to be visited by my brother, as you know, so that's that."

"Well, not quite," said Dame Beatrice. "Young Mrs. Camber has good reason to wish Hugh Camber out of the way."

"So Paul Camber *did* marry her! There were lots of rumours, but nobody seemed to know for certain."

"There were lots of rumours? Really!"

"You can't keep secrets in a village. It was known that Paul Camber stayed in Norwich for a month and it was noticed that the Beresford girl went to Norwich for the last week of that month. Then Stephen was drowned and that killed all the other gossip."

"Who noticed that the Beresford girl went to Norwich?"

"Various people. Norwich is a market town, remember, and gets pretty crowded, on market days particularly. Various people spotted Paul there without his noticing them, I expect, and if they saw the girl with him one day there were bound to be rumours and speculations."

"Which, no doubt, would have come to the ears of Farmer Beresford. I wonder..." She paused.

"Yes, Dame Beatrice?"

"I have reason to believe that Miss Beresford tried to blackmail Paul. I wonder whether Farmer Beresford uttered any threats against him and so caused Paul to make up his mind to marry the girl?"

"I should think it more than likely. There's a long history of alcoholism in the Beresford family and this particular Beresford is known to be violent when he's had too much to drink, although, to be fair, that seems to be comparatively seldom."

"A long history of alcoholism? That is very interesting. It may well account for young Mrs. Camber's epilepsy. And now, dear child, I want to pry into your affairs, and you must forgive me for doing so. A life may depend upon your reactions."

"Hugh's life?"

"It may well be so."

"What do you want me to tell you?"

"You are not, then, angry with Hugh?"

"Of course I'm not. The trouble is that I don't know how to make it up with him."

"I am the person with whom you ought to be angry. I was the person who went to interview Mr. Maitland and Mr. Tunstall."

Catherine laughed.

"Yes, I know," she said, "and at first I was furious, but it isn't very easy to remain angry with..."

"With Mrs. Crocodile, as my graceless secretary calls me. I am glad to hear it. Now, this is the point: I want you to allow it to be generally understood that your engagement to Hugh is broken off."

"Hugh really is in danger from the Beresfords?"

"We cannot take risks. There is still an unexposed murderer about."

"So you don't mean the Beresfords! What is in your mind?"

"Wars and rumours of wars, child. Will you do as I ask?"

"Yes, of course I will, but you'll let Hugh know the truth, won't you?"

"Yes, I will. I will also advise him to broadcast the fact that you have returned the ring."

"Oh, dear! Must I be as drastic as that?"

"Verisimilitude has great virtues in times of stress."

"It didn't do Ko-ko and Pooh-bah much good!"

"All ended happily, though, if you remember!" It was almost dark by the time Dame Beatrice quitted the cottage. Her way led her, after she had left the village, along a lonely stretch of country road bordered on one side by the high wall which bounded Camber Abbey park and on the other by dark trees which formed a thin, straggling wood behind which was ploughland, unfenced, which stretched, in daylight, to the horizon.

It had never before occurred to Dame Beatrice that there was anything sinister about this particular stretch of road, neither had she a nervous disposition. All the same, she found herself stepping along even more briskly than

usual and listening intently for any sounds other than those made by her own footsteps. There was also a certain sighing among the trees, for a stiffish breeze was coming in from the sea over the vast ploughlands, and this was inclined to muffle other noises; these she did not hear until suddenly a figure stepped out from among the trees and hailed her.

"That you, madam? Could I have a word?"

"If I am the person you take me for, you may certainly have a word. Who are you?" asked Dame Beatrice, without slackening her pace.

"I'm Beresford. I hear you've been to see the parson." He fell into step beside her.

"Then you have been wrongly informed. Am I walking too quickly for you? I find the evening somewhat chilly."

"So that is. You *haven't* been to see the parson?"

"I have been to his cottage. My business, however, was with his sister."

"What did she tell you?"

"I don't know that I want to answer that question, Mr. Beresford."

"So it *was* about me and my family?"

"You and your daughter were mentioned, yes."

"For why?"

"For one reason, I wondered why Paul Camber married your daughter. Did you threaten him?"

"He got her into trouble," said Beresford soberly. "I had to do my duty as a father."

"How did the rumours about the tutor Verith arise, Mr. Beresford? I understand from Mr. Hugh Camber that the responsibility, at one time, was placed upon this young man."

"I made my daughter tell me the truth."

"What caused her to go to London with Verith? Was that not unwise of her?"

“She told me the reason when I threatened to summon Verith for assaulting her.”

“I see. And the reason was...?”

“Verith knew of a specialist who might have helped her.”

“An abortion?”

“Oh, no. Nothing like that. You saw, this afternoon, what’s wrong with her.”

“Ah, yes, the epilepsy. Did you know she was going for this treatment?”

“No, I didn’t, or else I should have stopped her.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t believe it’s anything but a waste of good money, going to these specialists. Anybody who says he can cure fits is a quack.”

“How did you make your daughter tell you the truth about Paul Camber? You said you threatened to summon Verith for assault. Was that sufficient?”

“It’s all I’m going to tell you.”

“Why did you waylay me, Mr. Beresford?”

“That’s an ugly word. Have I offered you any harm?”

“You were wise not to do so. Good night.”

They had reached the gates of Camber Abbey, and light from a window of the lodge streamed out on to the drive.

“There was something I was going to tell you,” said Beresford, “but, as you choose to suspicion my intention, that can stay in my own mind ’stead of being put into yours. I’ll bid you good night, mam.”

“I already have the information to which you refer,” said Dame Beatrice. “TACBW, ditto C.* Don’t worry, Mr. Beresford.”

*Tom Adams can bear watching, so can Crick.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Man Who Knew

“There was suppressed anxiety and agitation in every line of his face.”

Wilkie Collins

“All of a queer do,” said Hugh, when Dame Beatrice described the encounter. “And you haven’t had any dinner.”

“Something cold on a tray, please, and not very much of it.”

“What do you think Beresford expected to get from you?” asked Hugh, when Dame Beatrice had been provided with her tray and a bottle of claret.

“I have an idea that he wanted to give me something. Indeed, he said as much.”

“Some sort of warning not to interfere in his concerns?”

“Well, whatever it was, it did not materialise and we parted at your gates with some abruptness, as I did not altogether trust his mood.”

“What are you going to do next?”

“Tomorrow morning, with your permission, I am going to interview Tom Adams.”

“Mrs. Beresford-Camber’s ex-swain?”

“Exactly, and under that label.”

“Tom won’t talk unless he wants to. He’s a true Norfolkman when it comes to keeping his own counsel. They’re not a simple people, you know, whatever outsiders may think. They can be as close as oysters when it doesn’t suit them to speak, and they are highly intelligent, although they may appear to be slow-thinking.”

"I should never underrate a Norfolkman's intelligence. You don't mind, then, if I speak to Tom?"

"Most certainly I don't mind. I only hope you'll find out something useful."

"I have every expectation that I shall. I propose to propound to him certain conclusions at which I have arrived and see whether Tom accepts or challenges them. That should give me a pointer towards my next objective."

She interviewed Tom in the gunroom on the following morning. He stood there, with his cloth cap in his hand and his boots heavily caked in mud, a tall, rangy, good-looking young man, his expression marred by an obstinately-set mouth which gave the impression that Dame Beatrice's inquisition might prove less fruitful than she might hope.

She herself was seated at a table and the picture might have been that of a small, elderly, determined but kindly schoolmistress carpeting a large, sullen pupil. She opened the session briskly.

"Would you care to sit down, Tom?"

"No, thank you kindly, I'll stand."

"Last year you grew some rather strange tomatoes."

Tom was silent. His mouth became a sprung rat-trap. Dame Beatrice turned in her chair and picked out a shotgun from the rack. Tom stared. His lips moved.

"No use to threaten me with that."

"I wouldn't dream of threatening you, Tom." She broke the gun open and inspected it. "Do you miss the rabbits around here?"

"Ah, that us do. They old rabbits, they make a tasty I'il dish for a change. That was wholly a shame, that was, that myxamatosis. Now all us get around here is foxes, stoats, and weasels. Got to eat, same as us, and if there's noo rabbits, they eat the ducks and chickens. Can't blame

'em. A fox hev a right to his life, same as ever' one else, I reckon."

"What about a boy, Tom?"

Tom looked troubled. He twisted the cap between wide, thick-fingered brown hands and said:

"I didn't see my tomatoes working out that way. You know I didn't."

"I know you didn't. What *was* the idea of crossing the tomato plants with deadly nightshade?"

"I wish to make Mr. Paul look a fool."

"How did you know that a dose of atropine would do that?—You know, you'd really better sit down."

Tom sucked his teeth and drew forward a garden chair.

"I went to school," he said, "and, us being country boys, they teach us country lore. Silly, I call it. Us know more about the country than them as teach us, I reckon."

"I quite think that is true. So they taught you all about vegetable poisons."

"One teacher we hev, he was very interested in vegetable poisons. That learn us about the foxglove and the henbane and the hemlock and the deadly nightshade and a mort of others. Course, us boys know they're all poisonous, but that give us their fancy names and then that goo on to tell us the symptoms, to know which poison had been taken."

"So you learnt that the symptoms of poisoning by atropine were so much like the symptoms of drunkenness that to the layman the two were interchangeable. All is made clear to me."

"I never meant noo harm to poor Master Stephen. Not if that eat all the tomatoes I send up to the house could he hev died of them. That were drowneded, like coroner said."

"True enough, Tom. Now, then: who, besides yourself, knew of this little practical joke of yours?"

Tom shook his head.

"I never tell no one, not even my dad," he said.

"Are you sure, Tom? I ask because somebody may have got to know your secret and may have made use of it to murder Stephen Camber."

"Nobody know from me. I keep the fun of it all to myself."

"The fun of having people think that the highly respectable and entirely teetotal Paul Camber was shouting drunk?"

"That's about the way of it, mam."

"And you didn't mind if Stephen Camber gave the same impression?"

"Noo, I did not. The bigger the scandal for Mr. Paul, the better I'd be pleased. Take my girl, that did, and get her in trouble."

"Well, Tom, you are most certainly avenged."

Tom averted his gaze.

"Can't say I want it this way," he muttered. Dame Beatrice got up.

"Thank you, Tom," she said. But Tom did not rise from his low-slung canvas chair.

"I asked her to marry me, all the same," he said, "but that wouldn't."

"Indeed? When was this?"

"When Mr. Paul goo up to Scotland."

"Miss Beresford was already married, Tom, when Paul Camber went to Scotland."

"Married? Who to?"

"Mr. Camber, of course."

"Well, her father never know that, then."

"Did he not? Well, he certainly knows now. What matters is that young Mrs. Camber is disturbed in her mind because the baby, legally a Camber (since the marriage took place before he was born), has no prospect of inheriting the family property."

"No. Mr. Hugh hev that."

"Mrs. Camber, no doubt, is very sore about it," said Dame Beatrice. "Now *you* have told *me* that your father knew nothing about the hybrid tomatoes, and *I* tell *you* that *somebody* besides yourself probably knew that you had them. What do you say to that? Answer me."

"Nobody know except parson."

"Mr. Tolley?"

"That's right. I tell him because that's interested in grafting. That say I'll never graft a tomato on to a deadly nightshade, but I say that can be done."

"Where, exactly, was it done, Tom? Do you mean it was not done here, at Camber Abbey?"

"Oo, yes, that was done here, right enough. How could I look after it, else? But I don't tell my dad because he think it a waste of time to muck around with experiments. My dad, that's limited."

"But didn't it occur to Mr. Tolley that the result of the grafting, if it proved successful, would be a poisonous fruit?"

"That never mention it."

Tom then took himself off and Dame Beatrice, idly breaking open and squinting at the gun she was holding, reflected that it was straining credulity beyond its elastic limits to think that Tom had told nobody but the Reverend Arthur Tolley of the experiment. She went to visit Tolley.

The incumbent of the parish was clipping the edges of a small lawn and Dame Beatrice watched him for some time before he was aware of her presence. When he had straightened up, he said:

"Ah, good morning, Dame Beatrice. I did not notice your approach. I was composing my sermon for Matins next Sunday and was entirely engrossed in my argument."

"I am so sorry to have interrupted you."

“Not at all. I am glad of an excuse to knock off work and invite you to come indoors for a glass of sherry and a biscuit. I don’t drink unless I have a guest, so your coming is in the nature of a treat for me.”

“I am not at all sure,” said Dame Beatrice, as she accompanied him up the long garden path to the cottage, “that I shall be justified in accepting your hospitality.”

“Really? How is that?”

“I have come to take you to task.”

“Oh, about my nocturnal visits to Miss Salaman. I have given them up. But, my dear Dame Beatrice, do you not think that the end justifies the means?”

“No, Brother Ignatius, I do not. I consider that a most pernicious doctrine. Have you ever stopped to consider what your parishioners—let alone your bishop—would think of these Romeo-sponsored proceedings?”

“Oh, but I assure you that I have confided in my bishop and have agreed to abide by his decision.”

“Well, it is not with your visits to Miss Salaman that I am concerned. I want to talk about your connection with Tom Adams’ experimental grafting.”

The vicar did not reply to this until he and his guest had joined his sister in the room of the cottage which did duty both as dining-room and study. When he had poured out three glasses of sherry and Catherine had produced biscuits, he said:

“Yes, I know. But, you see, I had no idea that Tom, poor fellow, intended any mischief.”

“So you know that, indirectly, those poisonous succulents brought about the death of Stephen Camber?”

“What does this mean?” asked Catherine.

“It means what it seems to mean,” said Arthur. He sipped his sherry. “I am partly responsible for Stephen Camber’s drowning. I should have foreseen that Tom’s was a dangerous experiment, but it never once occurred to me that Tom would try the results of it on anybody but

himself and, possibly (for he has a bucolic sense of humour), on me. That he would be wicked enough to send the fruits to Camber Abbey I could not have conceived, neither did he confess that he had done so."

"Really, Arthur, you *can* be silly at times!" exclaimed Catherine. "You surely did not think that a boy of Tom Adams' mentality would be content to work at a scientific experiment and not make any use of the results?"

"So *you* know what Tom did, do you?" asked her brother.

"I didn't know it was Tom, but I've heard from Hugh about the poisoned tomatoes and if you encouraged Tom's experiment you've been criminally thoughtless."

"My conscience absolves me, Catherine. I assure you it does. My own interest was *entirely* scientific, and I presumed that Tom's would be the same. No, really, Catherine, although I admit responsibility, I really cannot blame myself very much for what happened."

"What caused Tom to confide in you?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"He did not so much confide in me as ask me to check his knowledge. I agreed with him that the potato, the tomato, and the deadly nightshade belong to the same plant family and then I asked him why he was interested and he told me that he was intending to try this business of grafting the tomato on to the deadly nightshade in the hope of obtaining a fruit which should look reasonably like a tomato and yet have slightly poisonous properties. I challenged him that such a grafting would not work and he said he was determined to try. I was interested, as I told you, and said that if he did get fruit I should be interested to see it. Of course, with (I see now) the best of reasons, although he was successful he told me nothing about it."

"And Ethel did not warn her employer about the fruit because it would have meant a confession of her own

guilt in having taken what she thought were ordinary tomatoes from the dining-room sideboard. Well, it is all very interesting but it does not help as much as I hoped it would, unless—Where did Tom actually keep this grafted plant? Surely not in one of the Camber Abbey greenhouses?"

"Yes, I'm sure he did."

"But surely his father would have noticed it?" said Catherine. "And what about Paul and Stephen Camber? Didn't they ever inspect the greenhouses?"

"You had better ask Tom," said Arthur.

"I shall ask old Abel," said Dame Beatrice.

"It will upset him terribly if he gets to know that Tom's foolishness may have helped to cause Stephen's death," said Catherine.

"I hope he will not get to know. There is no reason why he should. In fact, I shall get Hugh to put that one particular question. It will seem quite a natural one, coming from him."

"I wonder whether Tom and Abel knew of Ethel's reaction to the poisonous tomatoes?" said Catherine, who had heard Ethel's story from Hugh.

"There's no reason why they should," said Dame Beatrice. "None of the servants had the slightest idea that the tomatoes came from Tom, and, certainly, at the time, nobody knew they were poisoned. It was generally considered that Ethel was allergic to them or was drunk."

"But she must have eaten tomatoes previously and suffered no ill effects," said Catherine.

"Quite so, but these, no doubt, were thought to be a particular kind that she had not sampled before, as, of course, they were," said Arthur. Dame Beatrice nodded and, soon afterwards, took her leave. Arthur accompanied her to the front gate.

"I don't like to ask her about it, so perhaps you can tell me," he said. "I notice that Catherine no longer wears

the engagement ring Hugh gave her.”

“I can tell you nothing about it,” replied Dame Beatrice, skating warily round the truth, for she did not intend to allow him to know that she believed the engagement had placed the couple in some danger from Stephen’s murderer and that it was by her advice that they had appeared to break it off. The Reverend Arthur Tolley stood at his gate and watched her until a bend in the road removed her from his sight. Then he sighed, picked up the shears, and continued clipping the edges of his lawn. As he clipped he whistled. The thought that his sister had broken off her engagement filled him with a most selfish contentment.

Dame Beatrice sought Hugh, when she got back to Camber Abbey, and found him, with a pipe in his mouth and a motoring atlas on his knee, in his library. He got up, took out the one and put down the other, and smiled at her.

“Every man who haunts the village pub has accepted it that Catherine and I are estranged,” he said.

“And every woman who haunts the village post-office has, by this time, no doubt, speculated upon the reason for it,” said Dame Beatrice, “and that is a very satisfactory state of affairs. And now, my dear Hugh, it would be useful for me to know how often, or how rarely, your cousin and his son visited the greenhouses here.”

“If they were like me, not at all. I haven’t been near the greenhouses or into the kitchen garden since I’ve been here. Why do you need to know, if I may ask?”

“Just to settle one slightly doubtful point. Will you arrange to visit the greenhouses in the company of Abel Adams—Abel, not Tom; I don’t want Tom to be there—and, as you are looking round, will you ask, in as casual a way as you can, how often Paul and Stephen Camber did the same thing?—either or both, I mean.”

“Certainly. I’ll do it now. Tom is busy in the punt on the lake cutting weed, and I’ve just seen Abel pruning the roses, so they are widely separated at the moment.”

He went out and was absent for nearly an hour. When he came back he reported that he had had a long talk with Abel about the gardens and the greenhouses, that Paul had seldom visited the latter but that he had had a habit of visiting the hot-houses to count the bunches of grapes and the peaches. Abel had further explained that he and his son stuck to their own jobs for the most part, rarely worked together, and were responsible for their own greenhouses because both liked to be independent, Abel having the practical knowledge and Tom some degree of book-learning.

“So it would have been the simplest thing in the world for Tom to have grown the poisonous tomatoes without his father or Paul Camber finding out what he was doing,” said Dame Beatrice. “Did you notice any suspicious-looking plants in Tom’s greenhouse?”

“I wasn’t shown Tom’s greenhouse.”

“I see. Abel really does respect his son’s privacy, then. It seems a little odd. What about Stephen? Did *he* visit the greenhouses?”

“According to Abel, he did not. Boys, even the quietest, according to him, should be kept away from glass, so Stephen was very actively discouraged from taking any interest in greenhouses and, in any case, the one I saw today was extremely dull, being used merely as a seed-bed and forcing-house.”

“Well, now you must see Tom’s greenhouse—not that the grafted deadly nightshade will still be there, I imagine—and put the same questions to him as you have put to his father.”

“After lunch, then. The gong will go in ten minutes and I must wash.”

Tom was busy on his half of the kitchen garden after lunch and his father was still occupied among the roses. At Hugh's request, Tom showed him his greenhouse and supported his father's assertion that Paul Camber had taken no interest in that or in the kitchen garden. Hugh had looked closely, but there was no sign of the grafted deadly nightshade although plenty of small tomato-plants, neatly supported by sticks, were coming up in flower-pots.

"I asked whether Paul and Stephen were fond of tomatoes," added Hugh, at the end of the recital, "and Tom gave me a very old-fashioned look and said that Paul had not been as fond of tomatoes as Tom would have liked him to be, but that Stephen may have been a bit too fond of them for his own good. A very revealing answer I thought it."

"Yes, indeed. Well, now we have to find the opportunist who took advantage of Stephen Camber's condition, after he had eaten the poisonous tomatoes, to hook him into the river and drown him."

"Yes, of course, and it won't be very easy, and—I hope you won't mind this!—there's something I want to do, in addition to that. I mean to go up to Strathpeffer and see what I can find out for myself about Paul's death. There is a considerable mystery there, and I don't somehow think you got to the bottom of it, if you don't object to my saying so."

"So *that's* what the motoring maps were for," said Dame Beatrice. "No, I don't object or mind in the very slightest. I shall be going up there myself later on, but no doubt we shall work along different lines."

"I want to know whether that queer fellow Wayland—wasn't that his alias?—is still there."

"I should think it very doubtful, but you will see."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Not Paul but Peter

“There had been a moment when I believed I recognised, faint and far, the cry of a child.”

Henry James

In the end, Dame Beatrice persuaded Hugh to put off his visit to Scotland for a week or two while she busied herself with various strange errands, the nature of which she did not disclose. All that Hugh knew was that she removed herself again from Camber Abbey and for nearly a fortnight he saw almost nothing of her. The days were lengthening, the weather was fine and sunny, and the three times he met her—by accident, never by appointment—she was armed with field-glasses and a camera and appeared to be watching birds, but, puzzlingly, never in the immediate neighbourhood of Camber.

What he did not see was a press photographer, similarly equipped, who took pictures, in a snoopng, hole-and-corner fashion, of the people of Camber, including Farmer Beresford, the Reverend Arthur Tolley, Hugh himself, the local doctor, Abel and Tom Adams, the agent Bembridge, the village postmistress, Ethel, the two Salamans, and, at the garage, some distance off, where he had found employment, the ex-chauffeur Crick. For good measure, at Dame Beatrice’s instigation, he also took photographs of Maitland and Tunstall.

When these pictures were developed and printed, Dame Beatrice released Hugh from his promise to remain at Camber Abbey and off he went to Strathpeffer, driving his own car. He came back at the end of ten days, telephoned Dame Beatrice at the obscure riverside inn at

which she had chosen to reside, and told her that he had nothing to report.

"No co-operation up there," he said. "I was as persistent as I knew how to be, but all they said was that the death had been purely accidental and that they were getting sick of being bothered."

"That's interesting," said Dame Beatrice thoughtfully. "It almost sounds as though somebody else has been bothering them since Laura and I were up there."

"That, you think, would be Verith?"

"He certainly was not at the Osseuch Hydro merely to catch salmon or take the waters. Well, it is time now for me to have my turn."

"I'm afraid I may have queered the pitch up there with my probings about Paul's death."

"Never mind. Laura and I will manage. You will continue to avoid Miss Tolley, will you not? And if there should be any significant developments at this end, you must let me know at once."

"The whole thing seems to be a stalemate. I can't see that there can be any significant developments now."

Dame Beatrice shrugged as she put down the receiver. She could think of several things which might happen. She even foresaw the one that did, and wondered whether to warn Hugh. She picked up the receiver again.

"On no account allow Mrs. Hal Camber and her boy to visit you while I am away."

"Oh, Héloïse has been choked off once and for all, thanks to you. I don't fancy she will darken my doors again until I'm dead and she comes for the pickings. Thanks, all the same, for the warning. I'll be ready to heave a brick at her if she turns up."

Dame Beatrice rang up Laura and ordered her to report at the inn as soon as she could if she wanted to pay another visit to Scotland. Laura, nothing loth,

banished her husband to his club, left her child in the care of a devoted Nannie, and galloped up to Norfolk on the motor-cycle for which she had recently traded-in her scooter. Dame Beatrice relegated the motor-cycle to the garage of the inn and they went north behind the sedate and highly-respectable back of George, the chauffeur.

The manager of the hotel did not seem overjoyed to see them, but he welcomed them politely and hoped that they would enjoy their stay. Dame Beatrice asked him no questions, neither did she speak to the receptionist except when she and Laura booked in. She produced her photographs for the benefit of the barman and barmaid and asked, casually enough, whether they recognised any of them. She drew blank. Paul Camber's associate, the elusive Smith, evidently had been of Paul Camber's way of thinking and had not patronised either the saloon lounge or the cocktail bar.

She then tried the waiter who brought coffee and drinks to the lounge. Here she fared better, although not extremely well. The waiter, a remote, austere man with the soft sibilants of the Hebrides, studied the photographs and said that he thought perhaps one of the gentlemen had stayed there. He selected the pictures of Maitland and Tunstall and then, more doubtfully, one of three photographs (taken from different angles) of Beresford. Very doubtfully indeed he picked out Hugh.

"Shows how much reliance can be placed upon *his* memory," said Laura scornfully, when the waiter had gone. "Why, Hugh Camber was here only a very short time ago, didn't you say? Yet he picked him out last of all and then he didn't seem at all certain about him."

"And in neither of the bars did they recognise him at all. Does not that seem to you very interesting?"

"Why should it?"

"Hugh Camber could not have stayed here, child, when he is supposed to have done so. The photograph is

an excellent likeness. Nobody could have failed to recognise it. Hugh Camber, although a reasonably abstemious man, is no fanatic respecting alcoholic beverages. Whatever he had *not* done here, he would certainly have patronised the bars."

"Then why did the waiter, however reluctantly, pick him out?"

"While the people in the bars did not? For a very simple reason. The waiter was reminded, I suppose, of Paul. The bar-tenders probably never saw Paul while he stayed here."

"But Paul didn't come here just once, did he? Wouldn't they have seen him about the place, so to speak, even if he never went into the bars?"

"The bar-counter staff rarely live in, you know. They come and go, and at such times as the licensing closing-hours are in force, they are either off the premises altogether or are checking empty bottles or taking in stock. I doubt whether they are aware of any of the guests except their customers."

"So you think Paul and Hugh—a family likeness, or something?"

"That is what I suppose."

"And the lounge waiter was doubtful because he'd seen Paul months and months ago, but had never seen Hugh?"

"Just so."

"But why should Hugh deceive you?"

"A fascinating question to which, at the moment, we have no answer. What do you think of the waiter's having picked out Maitland, Tunstall, and, after a long pause for thought, Farmer Beresford?"

"Well, I've noticed that there's such a thing as what I call 'the Norfolk face.' Tunstall and Maitland might not be all that unlike, to a Highlander, when you come to think of it, I suppose."

"Have you ever seen them?"

"Not to my knowledge, but my argument holds good, because I've seen those photographs. You'll have to ask them whether they've ever stayed here, and check their alibis for the time of Paul Camber's death."

"I don't think that will help very much, although I agree with you that it may have to be done. Did anything strike you about his choosing Beresford—apart from your theory that there is such a thing as 'the Norfolk face,' I mean—but only after hesitating over it?"

"Yes. Beresford's was the only photograph of a man with a moustache."

"That was the reason why the waiter was not sure about him. If Beresford *was* up here with Paul Camber, he may have shaved off that moustache."

"So you think Beresford's the murderer?"

"I have always thought he had the most convincing motive for murdering Stephen Camber, but I can see no reason for his murdering Paul. And, but for one thing, I should very much doubt whether Paul *was* murdered."

"What's the one thing?"

"The position of the body when it was found, and the fact that the deceased was without a jacket. According to the newspaper files which I consulted when we were in Edinburgh, the absence of a jacket was noted and commented upon at the time, but nobody seemed to know whether or not Paul Camber had been wearing a jacket when he left the hotel."

"I suppose the only person who could have made a statement about that is the mysterious Mr. Smith."

"Exactly. And he must be made to swear to it, one way or the other."

"But that means you know who Smith is!"

"Well, it seems fairly obvious to me, child."

"You think he's really Beresford?"

"That is something which can be put to the test, I hope."

"And *did* he murder Paul Camber?"

"You have been told that he caught the London train. Did nothing else in the story occur to you to be curious and informative?"

"You mean Paul Camber's behaviour on the river-bank when that coach party saw and heard him? It sounds like the tomatoes all over again. It's exactly like the description of Ethel and young Stephen, isn't it?—And we do know that Paul wouldn't have been drunk."

"It was neither drink nor poisonous tomatoes, dear child. That little demonstration, I think, was staged by Paul's murderer. After all, how was a coach party from Lancashire to know that it was Paul Camber capering and shouting? It could have been anybody; but because of the truth of a psychological theory, propounded by a very observant German, that there are people—and there are more of them in existence than the psychologist may have realised—who must join up the gaps, so to speak, and see everything in the round, the coach party, having heard of the death, leapt to the conclusion that the noisy, gesticulating man that they saw must necessarily have been the man who was drowned. There is no proof at all that he was."

"And rigor mortis and that sort of thing didn't help; it doesn't often. Who's supposed to have found the body and dragged it out of the water?"

"Members of a highly respectable salmon-fishing syndicate from Inverness. People it is impossible to suspect. It was all in the Edinburgh papers."

"So now what do we do? Home, James, and don't spare the horses?"

This suggestion was carried out on the following day when a telegram was delivered to Dame Beatrice at the luncheon table.

Mrs. Hal with Peter here wire instructions refuses to go Hugh.

"We must get back to Camber, I suppose," said Laura. "What time shall I tell George?"

"We must start at once. The one thing I was anxious to avoid has come about. Mrs. Hal is a criminally foolish woman. I'll pack for both of us if you will get George to bring round the car."

"Is it really so important? Right. See you soon."

That it was both important and very serious was obvious as soon as they got back to Camber. Hugh met them in the hall as soon as they had been admitted.

"Terribly sorry to call you back," he said, "but Héloïse has passed out and been rushed to hospital in Norwich, and young Peter has been left on my hands."

"He'd better be sent to my house in Hampshire," said Dame Beatrice. "He'll be safe enough there."

"Safe enough? How do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I say. What is the matter with your brother's wife?"

"Héloïse has been playing the fool and went to a quack to get rid of the encumbrance. She's really very ill. I sent for the doctor and he had the ambulance take her into hospital at once. A decent chap. But what are your fears for the boy?"

"I am not prepared to say, but he must be sent away from here at once."

"I'm all in favour. I don't want the brat! But, then, neither do you want him at Wandles Parva."

"No, I don't. But if it means that by going to my house in Hampshire—a nice long way from here—his life can be saved, I shall not feel that I can hesitate."

"Well, he'll have to stay the night here, I suppose, but he can go off first thing in the morning. How will that do?"

"Where is he now?"

"Safe in bed. Asleep, I hope, the poisonous little blighter!"

"I will go up and take a look at him. It is as well to reassure oneself."

"He can hardly have been spirited away! I said good night to him myself not more than two hours ago."

"Two hours can seem quite a long time. Are you coming with me?"

"Yes, I suppose so. What are you afraid of?"

"I hardly know. Maybe nothing at all, but, in view of the other two deaths, we must take precautions. Who else knows he is here?"

"Only the servants—the indoor servants, I mean."

"Abel and Tom Adams do not know?"

"I can't say. There is no reason why they should. As far as I know, Héloïse brought him straight here from the station, but, of course, that's more than five miles away. Various people may have seen them."

"How long were they here before Mrs. Hal Camber was taken ill?"

"I sent the telegram the morning after they came. It was too late to send it when they arrived. The post-office was shut. I didn't telephone because I didn't know whether you'd be there to take the call. Héloïse was taken ill—if we are to call it that!—almost as soon as I had sent it off."

Peter lay wide-eyed in bed. He greeted them listlessly.

"I don't feel well," he said. "I want to go with Darling." Dame Beatrice whipped out a clinical thermometer.

"Don't bite it," she said. "If you do, you'll expire in terrible agony."

Peter scowled at her.

"I know. Powdered glass. I shan't bite it," he said.

"You only take risks for other people; never for yourself."

"Out of the mouths of babes," said Dame Beatrice indulgently. "Now, under the tongue. If you dribble, it doesn't matter."

When she took it out the temperature was normal, but, sizing up the would-be patient, she gave him half a bismuth tablet and told him that it would make him sleep and that he would feel very poorly in the morning.

"I won't. Bet you I feel fine," said the child. "You women are just a lot of old bolonies."

"You shut up," said Hugh.

"Good night, dear boy," said Dame Beatrice, using coals of fire by popping a sweet into Peter's mouth. She detached the key from the inside of the door as she went out and inserted it on the outside. As Hugh followed her out, she turned it in the lock.

"I say, I do hate locking the damn kid in at night," protested Hugh. "Suppose the house caught on fire!"

"That contingency is remote at this time of year, but, to ease your mind, let us inspect the boy once more before we retire for the night."

They looked in on Peter at half-past eleven to find him asleep but restless in his slumber. Dame Beatrice straightened the tumbled bed-clothes with a practised hand and she and Hugh left the boy's room, again locking the door behind them. At six o'clock next morning Dame Beatrice unlocked it and peered in. Peter was awake. He said:

"Tell Uncle Hugh it's a lousy bed and a lousy room. I didn't sleep all night and I want my mother."

"Breakfast is at eight," said Dame Beatrice, "so I have brought you a banana and a glass of milk. Boys who haven't had a wink of sleep must keep up their strength. What do you say?"

"Go to hell."

"Taking my banana and my glass of milk with me? Very well." She retreated, carrying the viands.

"Come back!" yelled Peter. "I'm hungry!" He began to bellow. Dame Beatrice went serenely downstairs. In a few moments a tousled, pale, furious child followed her into the dining-room. "I *want* my banana!" shrieked Peter.

"I'm afraid it got scorched. Hell has rather too hot a temperature even for bananas," said Dame Beatrice, calmly peeling the specimen she held and feeding it in bits to the fire which Ethel had lighted. "As for the milk—dear me! It should always be kept in a very cool place and I'm afraid I haven't done that. However, as my throat is scorch-proof, perhaps it will do me no harm."

In front of the inarticulate and fermenting boy she sipped the milk with every appearance of enjoyment. Peter found his voice again. He screamed and screamed and screamed. Dame Beatrice, with a beatific leer, finished the milk and strolled out to the kitchen carrying the empty glass. She brought a full one back with her.

"Stop that noise, or you'll choke," she said, proffering the glass. Peter seized it, tried to drink too fast, and did indeed begin to choke, making a horrid mess of milk to mingle with the tears which had already damped the front of his dressing-gown. He recovered in time and continued to drink, eyeing her appraisingly over the rim of the glass.

"I met a nice man," he said, lowering the empty glass. "He said I could go with him to look at his pigs."

"There are lots of nice men in the world. They all keep pigs, so there's not a great deal in that," retorted Dame Beatrice. "I could show you a man who keeps dozens and dozens of pigs."

"Who is it?"

"Oh, a nephew of mine."

"What's his name?"

"Mr. Carey Lestrangle."

"Will you take me to see his pigs? Has he got a boar?"

"He has two boars, a Tamworth and a Large White."

"What's a Tamworth?"

“Rather an interesting fellow. A throw-back, possibly, to the wild hogs which roamed Britain during the Palaeolithic period. He has a long, thin snout and is sandy and black in colour. This one has a very short-tempered disposition and answers to the names of Abbot Thomas of Gruesome Memory. You know your Montagu Rhodes James, perhaps?”

“Will you take me to see these pigs?”

“Certainly I will. When can you be ready to set out?”

“Today?”

“This afternoon, then. I will telephone my nephew and tell him to expect us. And now you had better get dressed.”

“I’ve made a mess on my dressing-gown.”

“That can be dealt with. Leave it in the bathroom and the housemaid will cope. If she does not know what to do with it, I can tell her.”

“I don’t believe your nephew has any pigs.”

“Seeing is believing. Pop upstairs and get your bath.”

“I shall be sick with that milk if I do.”

“Cleopatra bathed in asses’ milk. Get along.”

“Why don’t you say, ‘there’s a good boy’?”

“Because, although I spoil and indulge children, I do not pander to them.”

“Don’t you like boys?”

“Real boys, yes. Crying, screaming, milk-gobbling, disgusting little objects—no.”

“I don’t love you.”

“Nobody asked you, sir,” she said. “Pop off.” She extended a sinewy claw and, stretching it to its fullest extent, she studied it thoughtfully. Peter, taking the hint, gathered up his dressing-gown and fled.

“He’s the most horrible kid I’ve ever encountered,” said Hugh, when breakfast was over and Peter had been sent out to play beside the lake, where a watchful eye could be kept on him from the morning-room windows.

“Poor child,” said Dame Beatrice. “I shall take him down to Wandles immediately after lunch and Laura will cope. She has a great hand with small boys and I have already warned her that he desires to see pigs and must be given a week-end at my nephew’s pig-farm in Oxfordshire. So all is prepared.”

“It’s very good of you. Oh, Peter is shouting to Tom Adams. Is he allowed to talk to Tom?”

“If he treats Tom to what appears to be his idea of conversation, I doubt whether they will be together very long.”

Tom’s voice came clearly across the intervening pasture.

“No, I hev no time to make fishing-rods! No fish in the lake, anyhow. There never was more than two, and old Noah, that ketch them for the Ark.”

“I don’t believe it!” yelled Peter.

“That wholly true.”

Hugh laughed.

“Tom’s had some of Master Peter before,” he said. “I’ll go out and help the kid fish. Must keep the wretched little blighter amused, I suppose. After all, he’s not had a square deal since his father died. Héloïse is no sort of person to bring up a child, especially a rather sickly boy.”

He went out whistling. Dame Beatrice sought out Tom, whom she found in the kitchen garden admiring some very fine strawberry plants. He touched his cap.

“Good crop this summer, mam.”

“I rejoice to hear it.”

“You fond of strawberries?”

“No, but I always like to hear that the goodly fruits of the earth are multiplying.”

“Mr. Paul, that used to count the strawberries.”

“As he did the hot-house fruits, I understand. Tom...”

“Not that old tomato-plant again, mam!”

“It wasn’t a tomato-plant. It was a deadly nightshade plant in the beginning, if you remember. Where did you get it, Tom?”

“In the woods.”

“*How* did you get it, Tom?”

“Parson tell me where that is, so I go and dig it up and bring it home mixed up with some sticks I cut for plant-props.”

“So that clears up that bit. And are you absolutely positive that you told nobody but Mr. Tolley about the grafting?”

“No, mam, nobody at all.” But he avoided her eye as he made this declaration.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Stolen Child

“He was neglected in his education, so that his knowledge from books is superficial. Yet he has picked up an infinite variety of knowledge from conversation. He has at the same time a flightiness...”

James Boswell

At half-past two Peter was kicking gravel on the front drive. At twenty-five to three he was throwing stones at the ducks on Hugh's lake. At a quarter to three he was at the lodge gates and at ten minutes to three, when Dame Beatrice's car, ordered for three o'clock, was brought to a standstill below the terrace, he had vanished.

For some time old Mrs. Maidon, dispossessed of her new cottage by the skilled labourer Deems and his wife, had been occupying the lodge and to her Dame Beatrice addressed herself.

“Where did the little boy go?”

“That was picked up in a car.”

“What sort of car?” (Useless to ask the number.)

“Oo, just a car. One of they motors.”

“Do you know the driver?”

“Oo, yes. That was Titmuss.”

“Titmuss? You mean Beresford.”

“I mean Titmuss. That live nineteen the village.”

Dame Beatrice hastened to the cottage. A young woman answered the door. Yes, she was Mrs. Titmuss. Yes, a car had been ordered over the telephone to call at Camber Abbey. No, she did not know at what time the call had come in. Bob had taken it. During the summer there were always calls. Fishing gentlemen mostly or those who had hired boats and wanted to go to Wroxham or Horning

or maybe to Potter Heigham. Bob got plenty of work come the summer. In winter it was different. No, she did not know when Bob had gone off in the car. It was no business of hers when Bob went. He had his job to do and she had hers. Yes, she sometimes took the telephone calls, but she had not taken this one. Bob had said that he was to go to Camber Abbey and he had added that he supposed Mr. Hugh's car had had a breakdown, but, beyond that, he had said nothing. He had just swallowed down his dinner and gone off. At what time did they usually have dinner? The woman stared in surprise. Why, at midday, of course, unless Bob was out on a job. No, he had not been out on a job that morning, so they had had dinner at the usual time, between a quarter to twelve and twelve. A man needed a meal at midday when he had had his breakfast at six. What was Bob doing between dinner-time and a quarter to three? The woman had no idea, but thought he might have been "down that old garage." What garage? Why, there was only the one. That Crick, who used to work for Mr. Paul Camber, worked there.

This seemed fairly promising. Crick, Dame Beatrice imagined, was intelligent. A useful chauffeur and mechanic had to be. She got into her own car and left George to find the garage. As, long before this, he had made friends with the proprietor, he knew perfectly well where to go.

It was a main-road filling station on the road to Cromer and looked prosperous. George pulled up and a girl in white overalls came to the pump.

"Two gallons of the usual," said George. "How's your dad?"

"Oo, that get about again. Fair to middling, that is. Go off to Great Yarmouth with a party of four this morning. Back about eleven." She suddenly dropped the Norfolk lilt and added, with a dazzling smile, "Yew wanna meet up with Pop, kid?"

Dame Beatrice was intrigued, although not astounded—for she knew him to be a man of parts—when she heard George reply:

“That sure is so, Baby.” Then his tone altered. “Bob been in this morning, Susie?”

“This afternoon it was. Soon after two. Fill up, right up, and pay cash.”

“Say where he was going?”

“Only that he have a fare waiting at Camber Abbey.”

“Crick anywhere about?”

“Sure, Big Boy.” She smiled again and went off to find him. Crick was in oil-stained brown overalls and had a smear down one cheek. His hands were black.

“Afternoon, Mr. Straker.”

“Afternoon, Maurice. Seen Bob Titmuss today?”

“Ah. Come in about two. Filled up and a pint of oil. Checked the tyres. Paid cash. Must have come into a fortune. We reckon to wait two months to collect from *him!*”

“Say where he was going?”

“Only that he had a fare waiting at Camber Abbey.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nowt.”

“Did he come back past here with the fare, do you know?”

“Ah, soon after three—about ten past, maybe. Doing fifty, I reckon. Too fast for this road with them worn brakes of his.”

“Didn’t happen to tell you when he expected to get back, I suppose?”

“Said if he wasn’t back for supper his old woman would create, but he wouldn’t be surprised if he wasn’t.”

“His number’s in your log, I take it?”

“Yes. What’s all this in aid of?”

“A kidnapping charge, most likely. We rather think the Camber kid has been snitched.”

Crick went white, and drew in his breath.

"The Camber kid's dead. What are you talking about?" he said.

"Mrs. *Hal* Camber's kid," said George, affecting to notice nothing extraordinary in Crick's reaction. "Staying at the Abbey. Waiting to be taken out in this car, along with Dame Beatrice. Snatched from under our very noses, as you might say."

Crick recovered his poise.

"Oh, I see. You give me a turn, talking about the Camber kid. I thought for the minute you meant Mr. Paul's boy."

"Well," said Dame Beatrice, lowering the window and putting her head out, "you deserved to be given 'a turn' if you allowed Titmuss to take out a car and ply for hire with defective brakes. If anything happens, I shall take care that you share the responsibility."

"Here!" began Crick, angrily. Then, catching Dame Beatrice's eye and exchanging it for George's cold stare, he capitulated hastily. "Can't come to any harm if he don't go through Cromer," he said. "Go by way of Saxmundham and Holt, can't go all that fast and there's no hills to speak of."

"Well, we'll hope that all will be well," said Dame Beatrice. "There's one thing: I don't suppose the man Titmuss realises that he is assisting a kidnapping gang, so he probably won't go faster than he should. Drive on, George."

She shut her window and looked out of the one at the back of the car, but Crick had disappeared. Gone to telephone the news to someone and tell him that he had given a clue to the route which Titmuss had taken, she supposed, or (with equal probability) to boast to someone that he had put the pursuers off the scent. It was anybody's guess (in Laura's idiom) she decided.

"Where to, madam?"

“Holt. You can get there without keeping to this road to Cromer?”

“Oh, yes, madam. I need not go anywhere near Cromer if I turn off at Aylsham and proceed by way of Saxthorpe—not Saxmundham, as Crick suggested. I can get to Holt quite easily then. What do you wish me to do from there?”

“I really don’t know, George. Perhaps we had better explore the north coast. What about Blakeney? I have always liked Blakeney—a most charming place, I think. But we had better make some enquiries in Holt. You have the number of Titmuss’s car and can describe the man himself?”

“Certainly, madam.” George pulled up in the large open market-place at Holt and left Dame Beatrice while he went off to make enquiries. She kept her eyes open but saw nothing of any significance. George came back, looking serious.

“Can’t find out a thing, madam. I’ve tried the police and I’ve tried two chaps with stalls. I’ve described the car and the driver, given the number, and said that the passenger may be a small lad, but there’s no response anywhere.”

“I think we are on the wrong tack, George.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised, madam. That Crick’s a fool. He’s given us the wrong dope.”

“Never mind. About turn, and back to Camber.”

“Very good, madam. And then—where?”

“To Beresford’s farm, I think. Not that I expect to gain precise information there, but it will do for a starting-off point. It seems to me that we were misled deliberately by Crick. I doubt whether Titmuss *did* pass the garage to take the Cromer road.”

George turned the car and they sped back to Saxthorpe and past Blickling, a larger edition of Camber Abbey and not as old by about fifty years, to reach

Aylsham at just after half-past five. Here George swung off and the car was passing Crick's garage as the clock on Camber church tower was striking six.

Once through the village Dame Beatrice changed her mind.

"Never mind Beresford," she said. "We will drop down there later on."

"What about going to Attlebridge, madam, to make for the ring-road round Norwich? There are a dozen roads leading off from it. We could enquire at every one and, if we don't get a pointer, we could then put the case in the hands of the City of Norwich police, and leave *them* to find the little boy, unless you thought we ought to get back to Camber Abbey, madam, to find out whether there's any news?"

"That was my notion, George. The child may be back there by now, with Mr. Hugh."

Hugh, however, was not at home, and there was still no sign of the boy. Hildegard Salaman brought wine and cold roast beef into the dining-room and begged Dame Beatrice to take some refreshment. Dame Beatrice herself was not hungry, but she realised that George should have a rest and something substantial to eat before they continued the search or informed the police, so she ate a couple of sandwiches and drank a glass of wine while George was regaled in the servants' hall. She was to ring for him when she was ready.

"And the boy is still lost?" said Hildegard. "That Crick is bad, bad! Will they kill Peter, like the other boy?"

"Whom do you mean? Who killed the other boy?"

"I give it much thought. When I am doing things I like not, I think morbid thoughts and one of my thoughts is that the farmer whose daughter has had the baby kills Paul Camber's son."

"Hoping that his daughter's baby would inherit the property, do you mean? That might work if the estate was

entailed, but it isn't."

"Entailed? Please?"

"An entail means that the estate must go to the next male heir. But Camber Abbey estate doesn't have to go to anybody in particular. The owner, whoever he is, can leave it to anybody he likes."

"To Jacob? To me?"

"Apparently. So, you see, Mr. Beresford's motive for removing Stephen Camber to make way for his daughter's child to inherit this property simply does not exist."

"Not good enough for sticking his neck out, anyway, you think?" said the Jewish girl, nodding. "I agree. Who, then? Mrs. Hal, to get the property for this little miserable Peter?"

"There is the same objection, don't you see?"

"So to nobody's advantage to kill Stephen Camber. Why, then, has he died? Revenge? It is not like the people here, that is all I can say. And that stupid woman, Mrs. Hal—no, I do not think so. Little mean things and a lot of weeping if she gets not her own way, but a killing—no. She has not the guts, nor, I think, that *kind* of wickedness."

"I entirely agree. Did Paul Camber ever make any advances to *you*?"

"To me? Oh, no! What an idea!" She laughed heartily, showing splendid teeth slightly stained with scarlet lipstick. "And, talking of men and women, but *not*, please, of advances, why have you stopped my poor dear friend Tolley from coming to see me?"

"I have done nothing of the kind. I understand that he is carrying out the instructions of his bishop. You knew he went to see his bishop, didn't you?"

"How can I know? Simply, after that fuss I make to throw Jacob off the scent, my Tolley comes no more to my room to read me Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. This

epistle is quite *enthralling* and I am missing it all the time."

"Well, why do you not tell your brother, quite firmly, that you are having instruction in the Christian religion? Then you could join the vicar's confirmation class or Bible class, my dear girl, and get on with your conversion in an open, sensible manner."

"With all those *dreadful* village girls? No, thank you! Besides, Jacob is not to know until I *marry* my dear Tolley. Then it will be too late for him to do anything about it."

"Forgive me for saying so, but I cannot imagine you as the wife of a country vicar."

"Oh, but I shall not be the wife of a country vicar for very long, dear Dame Beatrice. I have push and go. I shall make my Tolley the bishop. I have been in Norwich. The cathedral is very fine and the bishop's throne, it is nice also. And the bishop's wife would be very important, I think. I shall like to be the bishop's wife."

"Well, I wouldn't build on it, if I were you. Thank you very much for the sandwiches. When do you expect Hugh Camber back?"

"Oh, I have no idea. He is like you, hunting the little boy."

"Which direction did he take?"

"Left out at the gate and towards Beresford's farm."

"Do you think he actually went to Beresford's farm?"

"Well, he went that way, and Beresford is the most suspicious person, I think."

"Why should you think so?"

Hildegarde waved plump, be-ringed hands.

"To whom else is the advantage of kidnapping little Peter Camber?—Oh, I know you say the owner can leave everything as he pleases, but who would refuse to leave it to his own family?"

"You must remember that your Jewish tradition would make any other arrangement almost impossible for you

and your brother, but other people may think differently.”

“Very well; but in the library—only it is in the long gallery now, since Hugh changed the books—I have made much study of the Camber family affairs. I gain nothing for myself, of course, but it is interesting. There have been nothing but Camber family here since the year 1661, when Charles II gave the estate to the Camber who was on his father’s side in the Civil War. To that time the owners were for Oliver Cromwell. All Norfolk was for Oliver Cromwell in the Civil War and when it was known that Charles II is to be the king, the owner here fled to America, to New England and his estates were—forfeited?—is that right?”

“It would amount to that. Why on earth did not the owner sell them before Charles II could get his hands on them?”

“Ah, that!” An avaricious gleam came into Hildegard’s handsome and expressive face. (How unlike her secretive and self-contained brother she was, thought Dame Beatrice.) “So I myself would have done, but it seems that the owner was a minor, a boy of fourteen, so his friends hustled him away.”

“I cannot imagine Charles II victimising a boy of fourteen, but I suppose his friends thought the boy might be made a ward in Chancery. So that’s the story of Camber Abbey? I suppose it changed its name when the new owners took over in 1661.”

“Please?”

“No matter. Well, if you think Mr. Hugh has gone to Beresford’s farm I had better get along and see that he has plunged himself into no mischief. Farmer Beresford has a reputation for quick temper and I doubt whether he will take kindly to a suggestion that he kidnaps young children.”

She rang the bell and Ethel answered it.

“My car, as soon as possible, please, tell George.”

George beat her to it by about twenty seconds.

"Are you rested, George?"

"Thoroughly, madam."

"To the Beresford farm, then."

"Very good, madam. In case of a *fracas* ..."

"You suspect that there may be a *fracas*, George?"

"Nothing would surprise me less, madam. Farmer Beresford has the reputation of being a little bit short with gentlemen who ask him awkward questions."

"Such as?"

"I was thinking about Master Peter Camber being kidnapped."

"And what else, George?"

"That it appears, from what I heard at the inn, Mr. Paul Camber accused Beresford of killing his son."

"Did he, indeed! And Mr. Beresford refuted this?"

"He said he'd see Mr. Paul and his bastard in hell, madam."

"That scarcely sounds like the remark of a man who had drowned Stephen Camber."

George took a deep breath. Then he said:

"I don't know who did that, madam, but I'd take my oath it wasn't Beresford."

"I am beginning to understand what did happen, George, but we shall see."

"Awkward, both of them being brought in as accidental deaths, madam. Tied our hands, a verdict like that."

"Indeed, yes. Without definite proof, an accusation of murder could hardly be sustained."

"Should you desire me to drive right up to Mr. Beresford's house, madam?"

"Oh, I think so. We must arrive authoritatively. The clandestine approach would be out of place, I feel, on this occasion."

"Very good, madam. The midden can be avoided. There is a way through. He has a car of his own."

"That furnishes no valid reason why he should not hire Titmuss to spirit away young Peter, I suppose."

"I comprehend, madam. Yet I should put Beresford as a man of rather more than average intelligence. Perhaps I overrate him."

"No suggestion of *in vino veritas*, George?"

"Him in his cups gives little away, madam. But, if you thought to put that to the test, I should guess that at this hour of the day he would be at the village inn."

"Oh, yes, there is that, of course. Nevertheless, 'on, Stanley, on.'"

"Very good, madam."

They arrived at Beresford's farm to find that George's prophecy was correct. Beresford was not at home and his wife's sour prognostication was that he was "drinking his head off down the village"—and, in answer to Dame Beatrice's second question, that Mr. Hugh Camber had indeed called at the farm that afternoon. In answer to another question, Mrs. Beresford, who seemed ill-at-ease and inclined to be shrill and belligerent, said that the reason that young Mrs. Camber and her baby were not to be seen was that they were visiting friends in the village and would soon be returning.

"For why, if I may ask, did you want to see my husband?" asked Mrs. Beresford, when she had disposed of her daughter and the last-born of the Camber family. Dame Beatrice looked at her fixedly.

"I do not want to see your husband," she replied, with great deliberation. "I want to find out what has happened to Peter Camber, the son of Mrs. Hal Camber. He has been spirited away from the Abbey, by whose agency we do not know."

"Oh, that!" said Mrs. Beresford. "That's here."

She produced Peter from her parlour as though it was the most natural thing in the world for him to be at the farm. "That come to see our pigs. I'm only waiting for Bob Titmuss to call for him and take him back to Camber Abbey. I thought Bob would be here before this, but there, I reckon he's at the pub, same as my husband. Can't trust men to take any account of time when they get together down there."

"So Mr. Hugh Camber knows that Peter is here?"

"Yes, of course he does," said Peter, "and I don't want to see the pigs *you* promised me. I like Mr. Beresford's pigs. I helped to feed them, and I scratched the old sow's back with the end of a walking-stick and all her flakes fell off and it was *fun*. I would like to spend all my *life* at Mr. Beresford's farm."

"He's been a very good boy," said Mrs. Beresford, regarding him with a maternal, possessive eye. "He's helped with the pigs and he helped with the baby before my daughter took her down to the village. A *very* good boy, he's been."

"She's my aunt," said Peter. "I like her. She let me go into the hen-house and gather the eggs. A hen pecked me, but I didn't cry a bit."

"Oo, a little peck, that's nothing," said Mrs. Beresford, "and big boys don't cry, they wholly don't."

"No, I suppose not," said Peter, "if they live on a farm." He turned to Dame Beatrice. "Can I go home with you now?" He left without saying good-bye and was pursued down the passage by Mrs. Beresford's repeated asseverations that he had been a good boy, a very good boy indeed.

"She makes me sick," said Peter, unnecessarily, as they got into the car. "Being in cars makes me sick, too, I warn you."

"Were you sick in Mr. Titmuss's car?"

"No. I didn't think he would like it."

“George won’t like it if you’re sick in this one,” said Dame Beatrice, “so hold your horses, I would advise you, until we get home. Tell me how Mr. Titmuss came to pick you up in his car and take you to Farmer Beresford’s.”

“I telephoned. I fixed the time. I said I would run to the lodge. I found out long ago that Mr. Titmuss had a car. Uncle Paul used to hire it sometimes to take us out when he wanted to get rid of Darling and me and have Crick to drive him and Stephen to where they wanted to go. They never took us with them. I *hated* Stephen!”

“You telephoned! As simple as that!” said Dame Beatrice. “You appear to be a man of parts. I think Laura will enjoy looking after you.”

“I don’t think I want to be looked after. Has she got pigs and a baby?”

“Ah, pigs!” said Dame Beatrice ecstatically. She installed him beside George and went back to the farmhouse.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Cruel Brother

“‘My Lord,’ said I now, and looked him in the face, ‘a state of suspense and hanging on is a most disagreeable thing.’”

James Boswell

“As we are taking Peter with us,” said Dame Beatrice, “you may tell Titmuss, when he calls, that the boy is safe, but it is best for him to go home.” She glanced at the clock. “Peter goes to bed early. He seems to be a nervous, unpredictable child.”

“The last I don’t know,” said Mrs. Beresford, “but I wouldn’t wholly call him nervous. That hev nerve enough for ten, I should say. Been a proper old nuisance, ever since that come.”

Dame Beatrice accepted this change of front.

“Yes, he’s been brought up in a town. It does make a difference,” she said. “Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Beresford. It was good of you to have him.” She took her leave for the second time. Peter, seated beside George, was having the dashboard explained to him. Mostly he put George right.

“I want my mother,” he said firmly, as soon as he saw Dame Beatrice. “You had better take me to her at once. I am not going to stay here any longer.”

“A splendid supper, a comfortable bed, and then for the wide-open spaces, dear boy,” said Dame Beatrice, with equal but sweeter firmness. “Drive on, George. We will decant the wine and then make for the inn.”

This programme was followed. Peter was left in charge of the cook and was soon in the middle of an argument about toasted cheese as a desirable element in a young man’s supper. The last Dame Beatrice heard was

the sound of a sharp slap and an admonition to "let them that knows, know best."

"I think I shall advise Mr. Hugh Camber to raise Cook's wages," she said. George grinned, but, as he felt that it was hardly his place to reply, said nothing in response to a statement with which he wholeheartedly concurred. "Although, really," Dame Beatrice continued, "why the children should suffer for the sins of their insufferable mothers is beyond my comprehension."

"Boys need a father's hand, don't you think, madam?" asked George, who now felt himself to be on his own ground.

"Fathers are often worse than mothers, in my experience," retorted his employer. "Either they shirk their responsibilities or they take them too seriously. In any case, very few parents can be trusted to bring up sons. Daughters, of course, bring themselves up, in spite of everything their parents can do. All the same," she added, more kindly, "a boy ought to have a father with him. The human male is a gregarious animal and prefers the company of his own kind. Speaking of the gregarious instinct, I wonder what high jinks Beresford, Titmuss, and Hugh Camber are up to this evening?"

She was soon able to reassure herself on this point. The inn, at so early an hour, was not functioning at full pressure, and George, at Dame Beatrice's instigation, went in and spoke to Titmuss. Titmuss came out to her at once, wiping his mouth politely with the back of his hand before touching his cap.

"Ah," said Dame Beatrice, "I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Titmuss, but can you tell me where Mr. Camber's nephew is? We had word that you had called for him in your car."

"That's safe enough," said Titmuss. "I have word to fetch him back to Camber about eight."

"Yes, but where did you take him?"

"To Beresford's place. That's where I was told to go."

"By whom? Nobody at Camber ordered your car. How dare you take the boy away?"

"Beresford wouldn't harm the little child."

"Look here, Titmuss, from whom did you get the commission to pick up Peter Camber? In other words, who is paying for the use of your car?"

"Why, Mr. Hugh Camber, I do suppose. That know the little boy will be safe over at Beresford's."

"Did he think the boy might not be safe at Camber Abbey?"

"No, not that I know of, mam."

"What did you think he meant, then?"

"When my car is hired I think people mean to pay me for it, and that's as far as I think. I hev my living to earn."

"Well, think a little further. What did you understand by Mr. Hugh's saying that the little boy would be safe at that farm?"

"That didn't say so. That's what I say."

"And have you been paid for the use of the car?"

"I shall be. Mr. Hugh hev his own car, I know, but that won't welsh on me."

"Anyhow, Titmuss, don't trouble to go back to Beresford's farm to pick up the little boy. Come up to Camber Abbey and see me in the morning. Meanwhile, take this and drink the little boy's health. Who telephoned you, by the way, for the use of your car? I gather that it was not Mr. Hugh who actually did the telephoning, yet you assumed it was done at his request."

"I wholly suppose it might have been the boy himself," said Titmuss. "Did you speak to Crick at the garage, mam?"

"Why should I speak to Crick?"

"That know I call there for my car and that know where I was taking the little boy." He nodded and went back to the bar. Dame Beatrice followed him in, went to

the counter, and asked for a glass of Norfolk cider. This she carried to the table at which Hugh and Beresford were seated. Hugh rose; Beresford nodded. George took a seat on a bench as far away from the party as possible, to be out of earshot.

"Got the little youngster over at my place," said Beresford. "Mr. Camber seemingly didn't know that."

"No longer, Mr. Beresford. I have just taken him back to Camber Abbey. But why did Titmuss take him there without our knowledge or consent?"

Titmuss emptied his glass, said a hasty good night, and left. Beresford, at that time in the evening still sober, looked at Dame Beatrice out of his shrewd and calculating eyes.

"All I know is that want to see my pigs. He's a caution, that one."

"Quite. Would it surprise you to know that for some long time I suspected you of the murder of Stephen Camber?"

Beresford's shrewd glance turned into a stare of surprise.

"Me? And for why?"

"I thought you had an eye on the Camber estate for your daughter's baby."

"But that don't go by inheritance."

"No, it doesn't. So you knew that?"

"None better. Didn't I witness Mr. Paul Camber's will?—That was before he got my daughter into trouble—and didn't he make me and Crick read that will before us signed it? That he did."

"So you and Crick were the witnesses?"

"Unless he made another will later, that we were."

"And do you remember to whom he left the property?"

"That's easy enough to remember. He left it to Master Stephen. Then, when Master Stephen got drowned,

Mister Hugh come in for everything, so I take it there was a second will."

"Was nothing said about anybody else?"

"If I take your meaning, mam, nothing was said about nobody else."

Dame Beatrice understood by this that nothing had been said about the Beresford baby. Then another possibility, which had been lurking at the back of her mind, emerged like a large, rather clumsy bat coming out of a cave into moonlight. "So you knew neither you nor yours could have gained by the death of Stephen Camber?" she asked. "What was your reaction to that?"

"Paul Camber was always a bastard, but as I knew nothing then about him and my daughter, I thought nothing of it at all."

"How about Crick?"

"That glower and ask what about bequests to the servants."

"Indeed? Did such a suggestion surprise you?"

"Crick was always on the cadge from Mr. Paul. Seems sometimes as there was something up between 'em—something nobody else knew except their two selves."

Dame Beatrice's bat turned into a hovering bird. She had heard from Hugh that there was a suspicion that Crick was in a position to blackmail his employer into allowing him scope beyond the measure of his employment as chauffeur.

"You mean to imply that Mr. Paul Camber favoured Crick above the other servants?"

"And took a tone from him would have got anybody else the sack and a bag to put it in."

"Of course, the chauffeur would be considered superior, perhaps, to the indoor staff and the gardeners."

"Maybe, mam, but there wouldn't be any need for the master to take insolence from the man. And now, mam, perhaps you'll oblige me by..."

"Explaining what I meant by saying that for some time I suspected you of the murder of Stephen Camber? Certainly."

"But that was brought in as accidental death."

"I know. But if it really *was* accidental death, what can account for the death of Paul Camber?"

"I understand that was accident, too."

"Then what happened to the jacket that was never found?"

"I don't know that there was anything in the papers about a jacket. Anyway, it was summer when he was drowned. What would he want with a jacket?"

"Leaving the point for a moment, can you imagine that Paul Camber committed suicide?"

Beresford was emphatic in his reply.

"He wasn't the man for that! Too fond of himself for to put an end to Mr. Paul Camber, was Mr. Paul Camber."

"What did you think when you heard about the death of the boy?"

"One more branch lopped off a rotten tree."

"Do you consider your grandson another such branch?"

At this question Hugh got up and took Beresford's empty glass to the counter. He was back in time to hear the end of a lengthy and angry reply:

"...and kindly to remember, mam, as my daughter come of good stock, even if she is afflicted sometimes."

"I had not the pleasure of knowing the first Mrs. Paul Camber," said Dame Beatrice, "but my question was put purely in a scientific spirit. Look, Mr. Beresford, supposing somebody, out of revenge or in the hope of gain, did kill Stephen Camber, who was it likely to be?...the question, again, is to be regarded as academic. I am not asking you to accuse anybody."

Beresford nodded his thanks to Hugh, took a long draught, and said reflectively, all his anger wiped out, it

seemed:

"Let's see now: the most likely would be Mr. Hugh here."

"I assure you," said Hugh, with a smile, "that I was not aware at that time that, failing young Stephen, I should be the beneficiary under my cousin's will."

"That's as may be, sir, but what leads me to dismiss you, so to speak, is that you couldn't hardly come to a village as small as Camber without it being remarked on; and as nobody claim to have seen you here, why, then, I take it you didn't come."

"I have an alibi for that day, anyway."

"You're your own alibi for the reason I say. Now, then: what about Mrs. Hal? That's an unreasonable kind of woman and must have been sorely put out when her boy was passed over in favour of Mr. Hugh here. Then I'd ask you to look at the foreign young gentleman, Mr. Salaman. I don't trust foreigners nohow, and if Mr. Paul had tried to make up to his sister as he did to my gal...well, I don't reckon my gal was the first one to be deceived by him, not by a long chalk...nor maybe the second, neither."

Dame Beatrice thought sufficiently well of Hildegard's intelligence to doubt very much whether she would have encouraged a seducer unless he had considerably more to offer her than the nebulous promises which she connected (at the best) with Paul Camber. She nodded in a rhythmic, agreeable sort of way, however, and then enquired:

"What about the tomatoes?"

"Tomatoes, mam?"

"Yes. Somebody poisoned the boy with doped tomatoes."

"That was drowned, not pi'soned."

"The tomatoes were a predisposing factor. If he hadn't eaten the tomatoes, he wouldn't have been drowned."

“‘Tis possible, I suppose.”

“Have you anything more to tell me? What about Tom Adams and the tomatoes?”

“Tom Adams? What have he said to you?” For the first time Beresford looked more alarmed than angry.

“That he experimented with tomatoes and produced a poisonous type not capable of dealing death but most certainly capable of producing the more obvious symptoms of alcoholic excess.”

“That’s right.” Beresford tossed off half a glass of beer. “I did laugh when I thought of Mr. Paul Camber!”

“But you didn’t think of young Stephen Camber?”

“No, that I most certainly did not, and I hope you’ll take my word for it, mam.”

“I don’t see why you *didn’t* think of it!”

Beresford looked troubled and took a gulp which emptied his glass. He retained his hold of it when Hugh got up to fill it, shook his head, and said:

“No more tonight, sir, thank you kindly. Good night, all.”

Dame Beatrice allowed him a good five minutes to get away before she rose to leave the inn. Hugh followed her to the door.

“Quite an interesting day, one way and another,” he said. “Won’t you drive me back to Camber and have dinner? I suppose you won’t consider putting up there for tonight so that we can have a really good long talk? I gather—something seems to tell me—that you are on the verge of getting things sorted out. And what about the boy? Is he still in any danger?”

“Not while he remains indoors at Camber, but one can’t imprison him. He must go down to Hampshire tomorrow as we arranged.” George opened the door of the car. Dame Beatrice got in and Hugh followed.

“Camber Abbey, George, and the car at ten o’clock

tomorrow morning to take little Peter Camber to the Stone House, where Mrs. Gavin will be expecting him."

When they reached Camber Abbey they learned that Peter, suitably impressed by Cook's forthright tactics, had supped and was in bed. Hugh went up and found him beautifully clean and fast asleep.

"Poor little devil," he said when he came into the dining-room. "Sherry?"

"Not on top of cider."

"Nor I. Let's dine, then, and, over dinner and afterwards, you shall tell me all your facts, theories, and discoveries."

"I am not going to spoil either your dinner or my own by propounding facts, theories, and discoveries at the table. Let us, rather, talk of cabbages and kings."

So the meal-time was passed in airy pleasantness, but, as soon as it was over, and the two were seated in the smaller drawing-room, Hugh, leaning forward towards the crackling little early-summer fire, said eagerly:

"Now then: fire away. At what point did you decide that there was no reason to think that there was a plot to kidnap Peter?"

"Oh, but I still think there was a plot to kidnap Peter. It failed because Titmuss is a simple fellow in spite of his technical knowledge of cars and because Beresford does not make war on children. I have told Titmuss to come up to the house tomorrow morning, when I hope to get him to confirm my suspicions."

"Of whom? What has occurred to you now?"

"Nothing that had not occurred to me before. Let us take the facts. Now, the fact which brought me down here in the first place was the fact of the anonymous letters. Well, we dealt with those without a great deal of trouble."

"We now know they had no significance, except as a rather brainless attempt on the part of Héloïse to prevent me from marrying Catherine."

“Well, we’ll leave it at that for the moment, if you like. Then there was your strange experience of being left almost without servants. The current excuse was that they feared lest Mrs. Hal Camber should constitute herself the mistress here.”

“I soon disposed of that idea, I fancy!”

“Yes, but the majority of the servants never came back and, you know, we have wondered whether there was some other reason why they took their departure.”

“When the anonymous letters first came, we entertained some doubts about the verdicts on Paul and Stephen Camber, and it seems we were right. There was nothing to go on, though, except this peculiar rumour that young Stephen was drunk when he died.”

“Then Crick gave notice, although the two gardeners did not. What did you think about that?”

“With Crick it was a case of loss of face. He didn’t like it that I wouldn’t let him use the car at his own convenience. Apparently he’d been allowed *carte blanche*, near enough, by Paul.”

“We were aware of a rumour—perhaps a suggestion so vague that it could scarcely be called a rumour—to the effect that Crick had some hold over Paul Camber.”

“I don’t see that we can attach much importance to it, do you?”

“Vague rumours and nebulous suggestions are always interesting, I find. And do not forget that this particular rumour was emphasised by Beresford this evening. One of his remarks, taken in conjunction with the rumour, was singularly enlightening, I thought. Do you remember his saying that his daughter was not the first, nor, necessarily the second, girl that Paul Camber had attempted to seduce? I felt that he had somebody definitely in mind. The next point—if we may go back to the question of the anonymous letters for a moment—is that the letters, instead of containing the usual sexual and pornographical

allusions, were concerned almost solely with hints of murder."

"Damned unpleasant they were, too!"

"Don't you see where this is leading us?"

"No, I can't say that I do, except that Héloïse had it hotted up for me because I had cut Peter out of what she seems to have thought was his inheritance."

"But she might have thought of other things besides murder. There were all sorts of ways in which she could have attempted to blacken your character and with far more chance of success. Why did she harp upon murder?"

"You tell me."

"She harped upon murder because she was certain in her own mind that murder had been committed. She certainly wanted to make things very uncomfortable for you, and she hoped, I dare say, that you would be put to the trouble of trying to clear your name. However, as the authorship of the letters was never in any real doubt, that disposed of the wishful thinking. What it had not disposed of was the theory that Stephen had been murdered."

"Why Stephen alone? She thought Paul had been murdered, too."

"If she had fixed on the right person, she must have realised that he was unlikely to have murdered both Stephen *and* Paul. In fact, it was against his interests that Paul should die."

"Good heavens! You don't mean...?"

"Oh, but I do. For once I find myself in complete agreement with Mrs. Hal Camber. Stephen was murdered by the chauffeur Crick, Paul's illegitimate son. Good gracious! Why did you think that Paul put up with Crick's insolent use of the car if Crick had not the best of all reasons for demanding preferential treatment?"

"But surely Paul could have given him the lie? Crick wouldn't have stood a chance of proving his case."

"It has been pointed out tonight that Camber is a very small village. That is tantamount to saying that most of the inhabitants know what goes on in it."

"Yes, but..."

"Do not forget that Crick had a mother."

"But who?"

"I cannot say with certainty, but I would plump for the ex-housekeeper, Mrs. Brunton. I doubt very much whether the Mrs. Crick with whom he lives is his mother, but that is beside the point. The point is that, with Stephen out of the way, Crick, if he chose to come into the open and claim what he thinks are his rights, could most probably find supporters among the older people in the village."

"But she told me herself that she had only worked at Camber here for eleven years."

"As housekeeper. She is a local woman, though."

"Yes, and in her youth, I should say, a very handsome one."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Family Tree

“And hark ye—he is presently to die—let him have a ghostly father.”

Sir Walter Scott

“So, Tom,” said Dame Beatrice, “you told me a lie. You said that nobody except Mr. Tolley knew that you had grown the poisonous tomatoes.”

Tom twisted his cap in his hands.

“Well?” said Hugh.

“That was good for a laugh,” said Tom.

“It was good for a death, too.”

“No need for you to harp on that old idea.”

“Don’t be insolent,” said Hugh.

“A man hev a right to speak his mind.”

“So he has, Tom,” said Dame Beatrice, “but why did you lie? There was not the slightest need.”

“So Crick pushed poor Master Stephen into the river,” said Tom, “and that couldn’t save himself because of the weed holding him.”

“So that was it!” said Hugh, when the young man had gone. “The weed! It explains a lot. We heard that Verith taught Stephen to swim and even the effect of the atropine might not have prevented him from attempting to save himself. Of course, the brothers were cutting weed when they found him and pulled him out. But how do we get Crick and how do we account for the death of Paul? I would have plumped for Beresford there without a doubt, except that you said Beresford went off by train before Paul was drowned. Why the rather obvious alias of Mr. Smith of Girvan, I wonder?”

"I came to the conclusion a long time ago that Beresford was innocent. The alias business was just ordinary secretiveness. He did not want to appear under his own name when he was conducting negotiations with his daughter's seducer."

"Verith killed Paul, then?"

"Would he have committed a crime of that magnitude merely out of revenge for having been dismissed, do you think?"

"Oh, I imagine he killed Paul, thinking to avenge Stephen's death."

"Do you mean he thought *Paul* had pushed Stephen into the weed?"

"That is all I *can* think. I mean to say, if we look at the matter without prejudice, we must allow that Verith was extremely fond of Stephen. He may not have felt the same amount of bitterness and despair at their separation as the boy seems to have done, but no doubt there was a considerable feeling of frustration. Then, he knew, I feel certain, that Paul was the father of the Beresford girl's baby, and from this knowledge he may have deduced that Paul was tired of the sickly youngster Stephen and jealous of Verith's own influence over him. The thing is, what are we going to do about it all? It's rather late in the day to call in the police."

"The police will not think so, as long as we can provide them with something to go on."

"Can you keep me out of it? It'll make a first-class family stink, you know, if the police do decide to take it up."

"If the police find any evidence, I don't think we can keep the thing out of the papers, but I fancy we might be able to suppress the fact that Crick is the illegitimate son of Paul Camber."

"But what, exactly are you going to *te//* the police?"

"I am not going to tell the County police anything. I shall lay my suspicions before Chief Detective-Inspector Robert Gavin of the C.I.D. and ask his advice."

"I see. When?"

"Immediately. We cannot rely upon Tom Adams to remain silent. I do not imagine that he will go out of his way to warn Crick that we suspect him, but it will be better to take no chances."

"It will be better to take no chances with Crick, either. He strikes me as a nasty bit of work. I wouldn't trust him."

At ten o'clock on the following morning, Dame Beatrice drove to the garage and addressed the untrustworthy Crick in uncompromising tones.

"Crick, I want you to show me the place where Stephen Camber fell into the water."

"Me?"

"Yes, if you please."

"And what if I don't please?"

"I shall know what to think."

"Look," said Crick, "what are you up to?"

"I want you to show me the spot at which Stephen Camber, your half-brother, went into the water."

"Who told you I had a half-brother?"

Crick tried to stare her out, but his face went white. Dame Beatrice showed no pity.

"Do you know two men named Huckle?" she demanded.

"No, I don't."

"Or an old man named Tom Teek?"

"Course not! I don't mix with people round these parts."

"I think those three men will know *you* when they see you again."

Crick's colour came back as his eyes hardened.

"What's all this in aid of?"

“You know as well as I do. They were all somewhere close at hand on the bank of that little river when the boy was pushed in...in and down, Crick, down to the cruel weeds.”

“I don’t know anything about it, and if anybody says that it was me, he’s a liar!”

“You were jealous of that boy, Crick. You dogged his footsteps, awaiting your opportunity. As soon as you heard that Verith, his mentor and protector, had been dismissed, you realised that it was only a question of time before the opportunity presented itself for you to do Stephen Camber a mischief.”

“Me and who else?” said Crick, looking extremely dangerous. “What a tale! I ought to have the law on you for saying such a thing! You can’t prove a word of it!”

“There are no witnesses to this conversation, Crick.”

“There’s that fat-faced shovver of yours sitting there like an image. I s’pose he’d bear witness if I dotted you one like I ought to.”

“Be that as it may,” said Dame Beatrice, “you’ve been warned.”

“You can’t prove it, though, can you?” asked Hugh, when she got back to Camber Abbey. “He was right enough there.”

“I am not so sure about that. The brothers Huckle will recognise the fisherman when we produce him in court.”

“The fisherman? Oh, yes. But was that Crick?”

“That can be sworn to, I think, by the brothers. However, I have a stronger card to play.”

“It will need to be an ace if the police are to agree to reopen the case. In fact, there really isn’t a case. The verdict of Accidental Death was perfectly straightforward. There were no ifs and buts, so far as I am aware.”

“True. Are you familiar with the story of the purloined letter, by Edgar Allan Poe? Or with that one by Gilbert Keith Chesterton about the invisible man?”

“Oh, the postman, you mean? And the letter which was placed in such an obvious position that it was overlooked? It’s a long time since I read them and I can’t say that I remember any details.”

“The details do not matter. Do you know the thing which held me up longest in my attempt to solve the mystery of these deaths? It was that your cousin and Farmer Beresford went to Strathpeffer in a hired car.”

“A hired car...?”

“Yes. You see, I assumed, to begin with, that Paul Camber could not have taken his car with him to Scotland and so had been compelled to hire. But a man who employs a chauffeur does not go on holiday by train, therefore it was reasonable to suppose that Crick was with Paul.”

“But no mention was ever made of Crick by the hotel management, was it?”

“No, it was not. I inferred, therefore, that Crick, who obviously occupied a privileged position in the Camber household, had stayed in a different hotel so that he could act as a free agent.”

“As the gentleman born, you mean?”

“I think so.”

“So that’s where he learned to fish for salmon? I suppose he’d been to Scotland with Paul before.”

“Undoubtedly. I cannot prove all this, but I still think that the apparent friendship between Paul Camber and Beresford can be explained if we agree that Beresford had made certain that Paul’s intention was to marry the Beresford girl and legitimise the baby. That being settled, the set-up, for a time, at least, was fairly amicable.”

“And the hired car? Where did that come from?”

“I did a little research there this last time that I was in Scotland. The car was hired by ‘the gentleman who caught the train.’ It was hired from the station taxi rank,

picked the two men up at the Osseuch Hydropathic Hotel, and remained on the rank, ready for the next fare."

"And Paul *walked* back to the hotel?"

"I do not think so. I think the arrangement was that Crick should pick him up and take him to the Osseuch Water to fish. I think they both fished, but from opposite banks, and that Crick hooked his natural father into the river and drowned him."

"Desperately dangerous, surely? Some people might have come along and seen him do it."

"Perhaps they would only have seen an unfortunate accident. The water is very narrow at the place where Paul went in."

"And the evidence?"

"Paul's jacket, with the tear at the back of the collar where the heavy hook caught him."

"It won't be enough to secure a conviction, even if the police are able to find it."

"I do not think it will be necessary to secure a conviction. Crick has all his father's cowardice. Look there."

Through the wide-open gates of the park came a powerful motor-cycle, roaring along at full speed.

"Good God!" shouted Hugh. "He'll be into my lake in a minute! What's the fool think he's doing?"

"He is joining his father and half-brother," said Dame Beatrice. "I could never have proved anything against him, but he did not know that. I dislike the murderers of children. He might have spared young Stephen Camber."

Hugh tore off his coat and jumped out by way of the open window. He kicked off his shoes as he reached the lake. Dame Beatrice followed more slowly. Hugh dived in and dived deep. As he did so he remembered with thankfulness that Tom Adams had cut the weed. As he came up he shook his head and pushed back his hair. Then he took a deep breath and duck-dived, just as

Catherine came in at the gate. When he came up again with Crick's dead body, she was there.

About the Author



Gladys Mitchell was born in the village of Cowley, Oxford, in April 1901. She was educated at the Rothschild School in Brentford, the Green School in Isleworth, and at Goldsmiths and University Colleges in London. For many years Miss Mitchell taught history and English, swimming, and games. She retired from this work in 1950 but became so bored without the constant stimulus and irritation of teaching that she accepted a post at the Matthew Arnold School in Staines, where she taught English and history, wrote the annual school play, and coached hurdling. She was a member of the Detection Club, the PEN, the Middlesex Education Society, and the

British Olympic Association. Her father's family are Scots, and a Scottish influence has appeared in some of her books.